



# The Scarlet Lama

*Religion and meditation*

**Éric Loonis**

If you're enjoying this book and would like a printed copy for your library, head over to Amazon!

**<https://www.amazon.fr/dp/2493956087>**

# The Scarlet Lama



# The Scarlet Lama

## *Religion and meditation*

ÉRIC LOONIS

Copyright © 2022 Éric Loonis

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 9782493956088

**Other works by the author**







We dedicate this work to all the Egos of the Earth, in order to encourage them in the way of discernment, of the right vision and the abandonment of the Self and its beliefs. Peace and love are not constructs of the Ego, but the natural and involuntary result of the abandonment of the Ego.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. RELIGIOUS MATERIALISM .....</b>	<b>1</b>
FOREWORD.....	3
DEAD RELIGION, LIVING RELIGION .....	7
THE STRUCTURE OF THE EGO .....	19
THE DYNAMICS OF THE EGO.....	35
THE RELIGIOUS EGO .....	49
BACK TO LIVING RELIGION .....	89
LIVING PRAYER.....	123
RELIGIOUS METAPHYSICS .....	149
<b>2. MEDITATE IN THE UNIVERSE.....</b>	<b>167</b>
BUDDHISM AND MEDITATION .....	169
BUDDHISM IN PRACTICE.....	201
BUDDHISM AND RELIGION.....	231
BUDDHISM AND SCIENCE .....	239
GLOSSARY OF SANSKRIT TERMS .....	257
ABOUT THE AUTHOR .....	263



# **1. RELIGIOUS MATERIALISM**



## FOREWORD

This book of spirituality-fiction<sup>1</sup> brings to bear a prestigious Buddhist lama, with particularly deep and caustic teachings. Why was he called “Scarlet Lama?” There are several stories circulating about this. Most fanciful, even incomprehensible. The one that bears my preference simply says that, as a child and a little monk, at the age of eight, he did one of those stupid things that every child does one day or another. He poured into a dyer’s tub, containing two hundred sheets for the local monastery, a substance about which no one agrees, but which had the effect of permanently changing the color of the dye. Instead of ocher, saffron, orange, red, or brown, it was some kind of strange color, a deep, vibrant, almost luminous bright red. It was called “scarlet” because people there and at that time were unsure what name to give it, or even if scarlet was appropriate. Scarlet was said to come from Persia, knowing neither what Persia was nor where it was. In short, we said nonsense, but the word stuck.

One can easily imagine the dyer, mad with anger at having lost two hundred sheets. Since the fault lay with that stupid

---

<sup>1</sup> Spirituality-fiction variously associates spirituality with science, philosophy, psychology or other subject matter, featuring various imaginary “masters” (gurus, lamas, etc.) and methods (various meditations), with the aim of producing dream, hope, knowledge, reflection, and understanding in the reader.

little monk, he demanded that the monastery buy him the soiled sheets for repair. The boy was of course punished, but in the fashion of the monks, in the form of a karmic consequence, very simple and straightforward. It was decided that this boy would be the sole owner of the two hundred scarlet sheets, so that he would wear them all his life, forever bearing on him the colored sign of his fault.

What his masters did not know was that the child would one day become a great monk, a wise, from whom everyone would come to learn the deepest teachings of the Buddha. And since he still wore a loose *tchougou*, cut from what was left of the sheets of his childish stupidity, they began to call him “Scarlet Lama” and eventually they forgot his real name. Subsequently, Scarlet Lama was forced to emigrate to the United States to flee the Chinese invasion and its atrocities. There, he took advantage of the aid granted by this great Western country and followed advanced studies in theoretical physics and psychology. He acquired an advanced culture in philosophy, comparative religions and many other domains of Western knowledge.

This book was made from the compilation of talks and questions and answers with Scarlet Lama Rinpoche. Through his enlightening and prescient words and responses, the Scarlet Lama invites us to understand the true “structure” of the Ego and the foundations of the diversion of the purity of the religious spirit to serve the endless desires of this Ego, what could be called “religious materialism.”

I immediately prefer to warn the reader that the teachings of Scarlet Lama, in matters of religion, have nothing in common with Buddhism in general, which has a habit of being cautious and neutral concerning the beliefs. Buddhism is plural and varied, from metaphysical and mystical Buddhism to religious and worship Buddhism. Also, the Scarlet Lama’s positions on “dead religion” in this book are



not those of “Buddhism” in general, but those of the Scarlet Lama himself.

The believing reader should not take offense at the criticism of religions presented in this text. The text, and Scarlet Lama himself, are part of a spirituality-fiction and are only an opportunity to reflect intelligently on the religious fact itself, with complete freedom of thought, and with respect for believers and their dogmas.

The book, divided into two parts, first presents the differences between what Scarlet Lama distinguishes as “living» religion and “dead» religion. As such, Scarlet Lama defends a kind of personal, almost mystical religion, while denouncing the far too materialistic links of what he calls “dead religion.”

In the following chapters, Scarlet Lama deconstructs the concept of Ego in a fairly classical Buddhist way, explaining both its structure and its dynamics. It is a deep and fascinating teaching which is then applied to the religious Ego in order to show its faults and to highlight the egoic mechanisms, more or less perverse, which preside over the development of the dead religion.

After this critical approach to dead religion, Scarlet Lama presents what a living religion can be and addresses the question of Buddhist meditation which is its “living prayer.» Finally, Scarlet Lama works as a metaphysician by drawing inspiration from the teachings of the great Nagarjuna, his tetralemmas and the deep understanding of ultimate reality.

The second part of this book gathers exchanges by emails of Scarlet Lama with correspondents. A posthumous correspondence that is interesting to consult today. Scarlet Lama tackles very concretely the questions relating to meditation, Buddhism in practice according to him, some more thoughts on religion and, finally, the links between Buddhism and cosmological science.

ÉRIC LOONIS

The book ends with a small glossary of Buddhist terms used by Lama Scarlet, very useful for quickly having a precise definition. Wishing you a good reading and deep reflections.

**Éric Loonis**

## DEAD RELIGION, LIVING RELIGION

During the discussions that I was able to have with many of you, I felt a lot of tension and anguished questions around the issues of violence, war, terrorism and, ultimately, a questioning about the future of this world. I think that in these concerns and questions there are two things, which can provide the beginning of an explanation.

The first thing is the internet. At the same time, the Internet is a great tool for communication and knowledge (not to mention the multiple services associated with it), but it is also a unique and fantastic means of strengthening Egos. Not only from their strengthening, but also from their... excitement. The *news*, the *buzz*, the blogs, the forums, the social networks, all this amateur and disseminated “journalism” of everyone for everyone is becoming the breeding ground for vast controversies and uncontrolled conflicts.

In the old days, when someone came up with a small provocative idea, it could take ten years before someone else noticed and reacted to it, the temporal distance inevitably dampening this reaction. Today, a tiny human being, in front of his screen, with a tiny extreme statement, a tiny video or a tiny satirical cartoon, may very well set the entire planet on fire, instantly! At least, that's what everyone seems to believe. The impression this may give is that the next world war will be triggered by a cartoon on Facebook or a bad joke

on Twitter and will take the form of widespread terrorism, whether online or in real life.

The second thing, which feeds your anguished questions, and it is a central question, it seems to me, is that of the perverted, contradictory, incestuous links between religion, the religious spirit, and violence. What are called religious “extremisms.” While religion, like any form of spirituality, should detach us from this world, consequently inducing an openness of mind towards the other, the different, a compassion (I will be careful not to speak of “love,” sentimentality not having its place here), a tolerance, a generosity, a respect... On the contrary, it appears that the religious spirit attaches us to very harsh forms of “materialism,» which have nothing to envy to market materialism.

One can indeed wonder if there is a big difference between the materialism of religious extremism and that of the businessman, brewer of billions of dollars on the stock market. Both are in a relationship of selfish predation with reality, both use computer technology, the Internet, explosives and weapons (some make and sell them, others buy them), to serve their causes, to win victories over matter, over others and, in doing so, to distance themselves from all spiritual life, from all religion.

The etymology of the word “religion” does not mean connecting, as many believe, but rather what you are experiencing at the moment: scruples, anguished questions, morals or down to earth. *Religio*<sup>2</sup> is, above all, to question oneself, to torment one’s mind, in particular about the meaning of life, the deep meaning of all this, of the universe, of what is, of our desires.

However, it quickly appears that religion has gone astray, has given up the doubt of scruples to turn towards certainties, the concreting of beliefs, dogmas and the

---

<sup>2</sup> In Latin.

precepts of life. From the spirit of openness, of childlike candor, of intellectual and emotional curiosity, the religious spirit, the religious Ego, has passed to closed-mindedness, to deadly serious and stiff attitudes, to the loss of tender emotions, to cultivate only the emotions of antagonism, anger and hatred.

In fact, the initial *religio*, which evokes so much for you to “link,” to “connect” to transcendence and, certainly also to link all men to each other through this transcendence, this *religio* has been replaced, in the conceptions of the religious Ego, by the *claudere*<sup>3</sup>, the “closed,” the “shut,” the definitively freeze, frozen, even dead. We have there, no doubt, a key to understanding: a frozen, dead religion naturally generates, from itself and around it, violence and death.

Religion, nowadays, is fixed like matter. It has lost in this the airy lightness of doubt, which originally characterized it.

**Q.** How could this have happened? How did men lose the original religious spirit?

**A.** These days we find scruple and doubt in the free adolescent, one whose parents respect individuality and creativity. The teenager then gives us a good model of what could have been the spiritual questioning of men at the origins: to constantly question everything, to find for oneself, not to cling to any preconceptions, to have the courage, and unconsciousness too, to overthrow ready-made ideas and explore new conceptions.

If you are looking for what the true relationship to the Divinity is, it is this: doubt and not certainty, question and not belief. God loves our questions, not our prayers.

Prayer is the *precaria*<sup>4</sup>, the “precarious,” what is given to us temporarily. The religious Ego begs, makes its prayers, it exposes its *desiderata*, that is to say its regrettable lack. Even

---

<sup>3</sup> In Latin.

<sup>4</sup> In Latin.

if it is a question of seeking a form of “contact” with the Divine, the religious Ego thus places itself in a position of confrontation between its lack and what he hopes to obtain (crush the enemy, have a new car, get married or hear God whispering in his head, whatever). Religion is then only a magical version, in the sense of magical thought, of material lack, with which it is often confused. The religious Ego uses religion as food to sustain and strengthen itself.

The teenager, in doubt and questioning, is still in direct contact with the Divine. His mind is sufficiently open, new, malleable, to be able to receive this inspiration which seems to “come from above.” Unfortunately, we all know that the teenager will eventually become an adult. An adult full of certainties, locked in the fortress of his intimate dogmas.

We can imagine that this reduced model of the adolescent who becomes an adult is what could have happened to Humanity: from the incessant doubts accompanied by small conceptions-responses all provisional, there would have been the transition to monolithic beliefs, hard as rock, for hearts of stone.

Monotheism is often said to be spiritual progress, compared to the superstitions and idolatry that preceded it. However, one can legitimately cast doubt on this naive link between monotheism and spiritual progress. Monotheisms (already, the plural is laughable) seem, on the contrary, to have buried alive all the spiritual freshness of men. Paradoxically, it was when they erected their religion from the conception of a single God with, moreover, the noble intention of abstracting the Divinity from the material world, of breaking and abandoning the idols, that men then stiffened their inner life. From idols of wood, clay or iron, they have moved on to the unique ideal idol, an idea, transformed into an interior statuette to be adored and “prayed.”

In principle, prehistory can tell us practically nothing about this transition. But history, since the highest antiquity,

shows us men who have already reified their Gods. Intercessor Gods, materialized, with the small care of the human Egos. And reducing them to just one has in no way changed the state of mind of this religious materialism. So religion turns into a battlefield where everyone seeks to impose their point of view, their champion God, and protect their material interests.

**Q.** Do you think that Humanity could really begin with an “adolescent” phase, of true spirituality, of true religiosity?

**A.** It is an assumption. But you are right to doubt. It is possible that Humanity has never passed through this path of religious candor. After all, what we observe of “primitive” superstitions is hardly different from the great monotheisms: it is always a question of an Ego which uses a fantasy of the Divine to hope, to relieve itself, to beg, to complain and justify his worst behaviors. An Ego that strives to display on the surface the good sides of his religion (universal love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, generosity and so on), while using this same religion to support his hatred on the other, his intolerance, his inhumanity, revenge and selfishness. The religious Ego is a great specialist in double talk, jargon and professional or simply naive hypocrisy. Religion always disguises itself as the right path, the right message. We always talk about love on the front, but underneath it is always confrontation and violence that prevail.

**Q.** Is Buddhism, as a philosophy (I assume you agree that it is not strictly speaking a religion), closer to “religious candor?”

**A.** Buddhism is a real religion for many people. But it is not a religion, at the base, indeed. Therefore, it is difficult to speak of “religious candor” with regard to Buddhism. Some “Buddhists” can even turn into more or less violent fanatics. I think, finally, that by posing the problem from generalities, by saying “men,” “humanity,” it is difficult to perceive those who, among humans, have managed to preserve religious

candor. Speech is sometimes misleading. No doubt I was misunderstood when I spoke to you about the religious Ego.

By “religious ego,” I mean that part that exists in every man, in all humans, that part of fresh questioning as to the meaning of life. This *religio*, this scruple, forms basically a living religion, not dead, but alive! By this I mean that doubt, questioning, curiosity, astonishment, all this freshness of the soul, it is all this that forms the true religious spirit. Also, as soon as the religious Ego adheres to any form of conception, dogma, belief, rules of the game, that is when religion dies. Religion is dead, because there is no longer in it this life carried by scruples.

It is the same with the imaginary of the Divinity, whether it is the conception of an old man with a white beard or that of a pure abstraction, we are dealing with conceptions which “immortalize” and “freeze” the very meaning of the Divine. The Divine must not be objectified, whether in the form of a super character or an abstract super thing. The Divine is only a signal, the light of a distant lighthouse. It is an intention, a turn of mind, of a free and questioning mind. The lighthouse is no longer of any use to the sailor once he returns to harbor. The trip is over. However, the spiritual journey is endless and it begins again for each man who is born on Earth. Everyone must leave the comfortable harbor of childish beliefs and courageously follow their own path in their own darkness, guided by the lighthouse of Divinity, which flashes in the distance. This journey is endless, because there is ultimately, no doubt, nothing to achieve...

The most flagrant symptom of the death of a religion is the erection of a sacred Book, as the sole relation to the Divine. Sacred books are the testaments of religions, and we know very well that a testament is made so that the dead can still speak to the living, beyond the grave. The sacred book transforms what was a vivid creation of the human spirit into a corpse of spirituality. So, don't be surprised to see religions, since always, so closely intertwined with secular,



political powers, with merchants, and serving materialism far more than spirituality.

**Q.** To help reconnect with “living religion,” should the sacred books be burned?

**A.** (Lama and assembly laughter). Forgive me that laugh. But you can never get out of dead religion if you start “burning the holy books!” Don’t you see that would remain on the same level of discrimination as dead religion itself? If you really want to reconnect with living religion, stop worrying about “holy books.” Or, read them all, compare them, make something creative out of them. Then, drop them and dare the trail without markings, without spiritual GPS. Follow your own inner path and amaze yourself with every step. Such is the way of living religion.

**Q.** Can we oppose “false religion” and “true religion?”

**A.** In principle, Divinity is the inconceivable, the unspeakable and the unattainable, since it is a transcendent principle (I am not speaking, of course, of the Grand Guignol-like versions of Divinity, such as “Superman-who-is-in-sky,” but of an abstract principle, a reference, a symbol). From there, to call this transcendence “true” or “false” is practically a contradiction, because the categories of true and false may apply to a theory or to Superman, but have no relevance regarding transcendence. To say true or false religion or still true or false God, that does not make sense. This is why I do not speak of “true religion,” opposed to a “false religion” or even to an absence of religion (an atheism), but that I speak of “dead” or “alive” religion. The dead religion is that which is fixed in its certainties forever. Living religion is that which perpetuates and nourishes the questioning of the human soul.

Likewise, there are no “good” or “bad” religious Egos. There are religious Egos who laze around in servility to a dead religion and there are other religious Egos who courageously strive to keep up with the flow of scruples, of questioning, of all that forms living religion.

But note well that for a follower of a dead religion it is essential to distinguish between “true” and “false” believers, between “true religion” (his own), “true God” (His One), opposed to “false religion” and “false God” (this and that of the other, different from oneself). From this point of view, there is no contradiction, since dead religion has lost all contact and all understanding of transcendence.

In a dead religion, Divinity is an absolute, which applies whether one is a believer, a believer of another religion or an unbeliever. Hence the religious susceptibility, which does not tolerate any deviation from the dogmas of dead religion, the deviation automatically leading to a hateful and violent response. Conversely, for living religion, Divinity is relative, because it is not founding, but it is a simple transcendental reference, a guide for exercising doubt, questioning, scruples. In the context of a living religion, the categories of opposition of believing this or believing that, of believing or not believing, are not relevant. Living religion is eminently humble and welcoming, it does not discriminate and remains open to multiple paths of access to the Divine.

**Q.** You talk about “violent” religions. Are some religions more violent than others?

**A.** I am speaking above all of the violence of religions, of the religious spirit, of the religious ego. All dead religions are a fist of violence in a glove of love. For the religious Ego, love is not unconditional. It is not the love of a caring mother for her infant. Expressions of “love” or “compassion” on the part of religions are shams, because this “love” that all religions advocate is totally conditioned on the submission of all to the system of solidification of the religious Ego. The slightest deviation from this system and hatred and violence, which are the foundations of the religious mind, immediately reappear.

**Q.** But why are religions thus based on this substratum of hatred and violence?

**A.** Religions are human responses to the anxieties of the human Ego. They have an anxiolytic virtue, which relieves. It is not for nothing that someone has spoken of “drugs” or “opium” to qualify religions<sup>5</sup>. But it goes further. Because religion not only relieves the Ego, by providing it with ready-made pseudo-philosophical and pseudo-metaphysical answers, it also structures the Ego. This is why I speak to you of the “religious Ego.” Structure means here to give a consistency, an interior form, a base, a significance, a direction of the existence to the Ego by itself, in itself.

Also, to withdraw or simply to doubt, to question this system of existential support, which one’s religion represents for the religious Ego, is a highly dangerous act for this Ego. This calls into question its very existence! Then, hatred and violence become a natural reflex to immediately protect oneself from the risk of seeing this whole egoic structure crumble and disappear.

It is for this reason that the prerequisite for any religious system is the discrimination between living religion and dead religion. Dead religion is the religious system, all religious systems, which implicitly or explicitly assume that other religions, or non-religious people, are the enemies to be destroyed. This is why religions have invented notions such as “blasphemy,” “apostasy,” “heresy,” that is to say conceptions that undermine the religious construct.

The religious Ego is so fragile that it vitally needs this kernel of hatred and violence in its heart in order to survive. Afterwards, to look good, over all this we spread a coating to hide the inner misery and the dark side. Several layers of flashy paint are applied: love, altruism, generosity, and even tolerance, to give a beautiful glossy varnish look. But this is

---

<sup>5</sup> Reference is made here to Karl Marx, when he denounces the anesthetic, alienating and mystifying functions of religions on the collective mentality and who thus qualifies religion as “the opium of the people,” in his work “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right.”

only falsification and self-deception. The hateful and anguished core is still present, at the heart of all dead religions.

**Q.** How is the materialistic religious Ego formed?

**A.** Dead religions lead the religious Ego down the path of “spiritual myopia” and intellectual at the same time. It is the fact of not seeing further than the terrestrial horizon, whereas one is in an infinite universe, that the planet Earth, in this infinite universe, is only one atom of matter. And, faced with this disproportion, which should normally lead to the humility of the Ego, to the recognition of its infinite insignificance (which is the first step towards its Emptiness), this one classifies itself on the contrary as a special being, having a privileged link with the *Big Boss* .

It's a kind of spiritual overstatement, as if ants erected as wrathful Divinity the kid who comes to set foot in the anthill. Obviously, the game is clear, all this spiritual myopia has only one goal: to maintain the materialist version of the religious Ego. It is a question of puffing up the ego of the believer, of inflating it with sufficiency, of maintaining a pathological egotism. When happiness comes, the Ego thanks and praises God; when it is a misfortune that occurs, then it is God who inflicts a “trial” on it. When the religious Ego is in uncertainty, then it is “God willing.” In any case, the believer feels he has a long arm, an arm that reaches to Heaven. The idea of God and a connection to God is no longer a vivid and humble speculation, but a grandiloquent and arrogant relationship.

Subsequently, the materialistic religious Ego will believe in its own spiritual “substance.” He variously calls it the soul, the atman, the spirit, the essence of being. Terms that I use here according to their personalistic and materialistic meanings. Some even claim to have weighed the soul: 21 grams! Realize! It is an additional belief intended to nourish and comfort the religious Ego. Thus, the religious Ego is not

satisfied with having an incarnation, it must also have a soul! *Hardware* and *software*, in a way.

To solidify itself, the religious Ego thus plays on all fronts. The materialistic religious Ego can be understood according to a chemical metaphor, that of a body initially gaseous, which becomes liquid, then pasty, more and more consistent, until it becomes completely solid. At this stage, we obtain a particularly hard egoic block, armored with conceptions and beliefs, which are absolute and eternal. In the Buddhist teachings, we also speak of a monkey, locked in a cell with opaque and solid, hard and indestructible walls, walls that he built himself by fidgeting a little too much...

**Q.** How would you define religious materialism in one short sentence?

**A.** Religious materialism consists of diverting the inner movement of encountering the Divine, by projecting and externalizing it onto the material world and its appearances and human affairs.



## THE STRUCTURE OF THE EGO

To fully understand religious materialism, it is necessary to understand the religious Ego. But for this, long before, it is necessary to understand the Ego, which characterizes the psychology of each one of us. Usually in Buddhist teachings the structure of the Ego is presented in the form of the five aggregates. I know that most of you are familiar with the teaching of the five *Skandhas*, which are: bodily form (*Rūpa*), sensations (*Vedanā*), perceptions (*Samjñā*), mind (*Samskāra*) and consciousness (*Vijñāna*). These five aggregates constitute the Ego in general, that is to say the human being, each one of us.

If we say “aggregates,” we do not say “structure,” the two terms are normally antinomic. We say “aggregates” to clearly mark the inconsistent nature, at the base, of the Ego. The Ego is an amalgam of tendencies, it is an illusion. It is an assembly of elements that have no consistency, in the sense that they don’t really correspond to a tangible reality. It is rather an assemblage of desires, drives, impulses, reflex reactions without analysis, surface discriminations, reflections too, but based on phantasmagoria. All this constitutes the person’s self, his personality. And all this does not really have a serious metaphysical foundation.

However, I am going to talk to you about the “structure” of the Ego. However, you should not consider this term “structure” as applying to the Ego itself, but rather to the

organization of the information that I am going to transmit to you concerning this Ego. Basically, the Ego is emptiness, but it self generates *Nāmarūpa*, the illusion of existence, in order to give itself consistency. This illusion is built on several layers of informational elements. And it is these informational layers, eight in number, that I am going to present to you in a structured form. In fact, the five *Skandhas* will be present in this description, but some of them will be broken down into sub-structures, which will then allow us to locate, from which stage of the development of the Ego emerges living religion and dead religion. Thus, *Nāmarūpa* is decomposable into eight layers, which constitute the eight peels of the onion Ego, the one who says to itself: “I am.”

**Vidyā.** At the start (this is a necessary temporal metaphor in order to be able to describe the structure of the Ego in a sequential form), at the start therefore, there is *Vidyā*. *Vidyā* is obviously not a “structure” of the Ego, since *Vidyā* is the opening in the absence of Ego. At most one can consider *Vidyā* as a “minimal” experience of Ego. *Vidyā* is a form of open intelligence, an open mind, which is one with the universe. It is a direct opening, without any conceptualization. At this stage, there is no body, no mind, no discrimination of the self with the environment. There is no Ego yet, no phenomenal information yet in the sense that there is no transmitter, no channel, no receiver. Everything is right there. It is as if you were sitting in meditation on a rock. Around you there is the universe, an environment, the landscape, the countryside, the hills in the distance, the sky and the clouds, the sun, the surrounding noises, the wind blowing in your face. But, you dozed off. You lost consciousness.

Suddenly, the master taps you on the shoulder and you wake up with a start. For a very short fraction of a second, you are going to be aware of everything, of the universe and your body connected to the universe, without separation, without ego consciousness, without space, without duration.



A pure “being there,” in a pure existential openness. Such is *Vidyā* the original core, not of the Ego, but of what constitutes the heart of the Ego or of the non-Ego, as you will, and which is and will always be there, under the different layers that we will now present.

The experience of *Vidyā* only lasted a fraction of a second. For a fraction of a second you were like a newborn, born to himself and to the universe and still unable to give meaning, to have a step back, in relation to this experience. He is there, his eyes wide open, astonished and delighted at the same time, as if amazed. Then, it happens like a sudden shift. This could be compared to the supercooling phenomenon. If you fill a container with very pure water, under certain conditions it is possible to cool this water below zero degrees Celsius without it freezing. It remains in the liquid phase, does not pass into the solid phase. But this state is very fragile and temporary. All you have to do is drop a single grain of sand into this water for it to immediately solidify completely.

***Avidyā.*** The master has just tapped you on the shoulder and that has brought you out of your slumber. And for a tiny fraction of a second, your open consciousness communicates directly with the universe. But, immediately afterwards, this open-mindedness freezes and gets lost, disappears, it is *Avidyā*, non-intelligence, non-openness. It is also an ignorance, the ignorance of openness, of being there, of unity with the universe. From there, the first phenomenal information will emerge, as a first universe-me duality. It is the creation of space: the universe is there, around me and I am here. It is also the creation of one’s own body, conceived in a universe that this body begins to feel. *Avidyā*, which is the first of the eight structures of the Ego, is the first conceptualization of form-ignorance. It is a belief, the very first of beliefs and also the birth of logic, whereas until then, with *Vidyā*, we were outside of all logic.

***Śāśvatanāma.*** Immediately after... And the terms “immediately after” are not without importance, you will see.

Immediately after emerges a second form-ignorance, the second structure of the Ego, the spirit which lasts, temporal, which believes to have always existed. It is *Śāśvatanāma*, the birth of time, of duration, based on immediate memory. If with *Avidyā* the space has deepened, with a here and a there, with *Śāśvatanāma* time begins to flow, with moments which follow one another, one after the other, generating a trail, the past. We have here the emergence of a second conceptualization of form-ignorance, a second duality, past-present. The Ego then conceives itself as an eternal entity.

You're still sitting on that rock. The master, who has just awakened you, moves away from you. It is already a memory. Mental formations appear immediately, like a string linking the past, the present and the future. You think back to this sudden enlightenment, to this very brief experience of communion with the Whole and you regret its disappearance. You start chasing after the present and imagining what the next moment is going to be like. Your Ego first built a depth of space around you. Now it has just built the depth of the weave of time that runs through you.

***Rūpa*.** The third structure and conception of form-ignorance, which founds the Ego, is built from a reflection, as in a mirror: the Ego contemplates itself. It reifies itself, becomes a thing, an object, its own object, it is *Rūpa*, the first true discrimination between the Ego and the various things and beings which surround it. Specific objects then appear for the Ego, but also alter egos, the others who, thereafter, will all be targets for the desires, or repulsions, or indifferences, of the Ego.

Sitting on your rock, a radar screen lit up within you. From now on, space and time are populated for you with various significant things. The master who walks away after slapping you on the shoulder is a special being, either a "great master," full of wisdom, or a "borer" whose brutality you did not appreciate. Because, after all, you were so well, asleep on this rock... And then, there is the rock, a little hard under

your buttocks. There is the landscape “how beautiful!” There is the fly that harasses you “let’s drive it away with a hand.” There are so many things... And all these things serve you, serve the Ego to situate itself, to define itself in relation to itself. The Ego is what is not the master, what is not the rock, what is not the landscape, what is not the fly. Take it all away and... what’s left? The Ego. Such is *Rūpa*, a demonstration and confirmation of the Ego, to itself, by itself and through the absurd, in a way.

***Vedanā*.** From *Vidyā*, the first three egoic structures, *Avidyā*, *Śāśvatanāma* and *Rūpa*, are said to be corporeal, because they define the embodiment of the Ego: its situation in a space and in a temporality, as well as the perception-recognition of it as incarnation, soma, object, discriminated from other objects or beings.

The following structures will go beyond this incarnation and bring us into the mental, psychic dimension of the Ego. The first of these mental structures (the fourth concerning the Ego) is *Vedanā*, the form-qualities, the sensations. The things-concepts discriminated from *Rūpa*, are now extended as a sensory universe of discriminations. The universe is broken down into an infinity of elements which each have a combination of apparent forms, which are structured according to six categories of sensations. *Vedanā* is thus structured in visual sensations, auditory sensations, tactile sensations, olfactory sensations, taste sensations. But again, *Vedanā* also concerns the sensations attached to the own body of Ego, what is called cenesthesia, muscular, visceral sensations, etc.

Sitting on your rock, less than five seconds after the sudden emergence from your slumber, all the beings and objects around you, discriminated against from your Ego, will dress in beautiful colors: the green of the surrounding countryside, the blue of the sky, the white of the rock, the orange of the beautiful dress which disguises you as a little Buddha. The air fills with sound sensations: the chirping of

crickets, the buzzing of insects, the bell of the village in the distance, car traffic... On your skin, other sensations: the orange robe of little Buddha who is a little scratchy, the fly on your nose. And then, smells, the scents of incense perhaps, the taste of chewing gum that you have just surreptitiously put in your mouth to try out a new meditation technique. Because meditation is not easy at first. Other sensations assail you, coming directly from the body of the Ego: the back tired and achy from standing straight, the stiff legs, full of "pins and needles," the belly which gurgles, the afternoon has been long and you're a little hungry. The whole universe of the Ego is thus clothed with beautiful sensations, picturesque, interesting, fascinating. A sensory body in augmented reality, surrounded by a Technicolor universe, a Dolby stereo soundtrack, plus tactile, fragrant and tasty special effects. The great cinema of the Ego!

***Samjñā.*** The following structure (the fifth) will endeavor to give a primary and simplistic meaning to things and to the sensations which emanate from them. It is about *Samjñā*, the perceptions. Each element of the universe is then charged with a quality which resonates with the tendencies of the Ego. Which draws the Ego into primary reactions, feelings. Forms of emotions that can be structured into three major trends: the attraction that animates desire; repulsion, which is accompanied by a feeling of threat; and neutrality, indifference.

Sitting on a rock, the master in the distance, addressing other meditation students, has become indifferent to you. On the other hand, your gaze is drawn to the panorama and lingers there. On the other hand, the fly that twirls in front of your face continues to irritate you and you hunt it with anger. Why don't you have a weapon to get rid of it definitively, an insecticide bomb to kill it! Although that does not sound very Buddhist! (assembly laughter).

***Samskāra.*** Less than ten seconds after the Big Bang of your awakening, your Ego is already chasing flies! From the

feelings, the Ego consolidates itself through various judgments which incite to the action, to the impulses. It is *Samskāra*, the practically automatic reactions which follow the perceptions of *Samjñā*, the sixth structure of the Ego. Attraction involves the impulses to attract to oneself, to monopolize a thing, to consume a thing, a totally unilateral form of love, because it is utilitarian: I love what I desire. Conversely, repulsion leads to the impulses to repel, to attack, to destroy, to implement hatred, even towards a fly! Finally, indifference leads to various forms of inhibition, non-reaction, boredom too.

The master in the distance has turned towards you and he sees you daydream, eyes in the sky, fidgeting to shoo away a fly and again noticing your body sagging in boredom. Suddenly you see him staring at you. The Ego then feels very embarrassed, like a pupil caught at fault by his teacher. You can hardly make out his expression at this distance, but at first you have the impression that the master has his face closed, his eyebrows furrowed, that he would even be angry with you. But suddenly, he points at you and bursts into a loud laugh and all the meditation students around start laughing too. We make fun of your Ego which wants to play the little Buddha. And as you are far enough along the Path, you can't get upset, you can only laugh in your turn, let yourself be carried away by the collective hilarity, which makes you plunge back, suddenly, for a few brief moments, in *Vidyā*, open-mindedness, the universe without impulse, without feeling, without sensation, without Ego.

***Vijñāna*.** At each stage of the construction of the Ego, it becomes more and more sophisticated. After impulses come concepts. Information is deployed in increasingly complex mental structures. *Vijñāna* represents information, ideas transformed into things, it is the seventh structure of the Ego. The Ego feeds on a whole bunch of intellectualizations, ideal discriminations, categorizations, label sticking, visions of the world. The Ego begins to manipulate logic, until it

becomes illogical, to develop interpretations of things, of ideas and even to give interpretations to interpretations. The Ego constructs a paradigm around itself, a set of beliefs, models of thought, mental attitudes, mentalities, values, which form a sort of cage around it which, at the same time encloses it, but also supports it, gives it consistency. All categories are solicited: the beautiful, the ugly, the good, the bad, the black, the white, the Arab, the Jew, the Hindu, the Muslim, the Christian, the Buddhist... The me and my neighbour, the man and the woman, the dominant and the dominated, the powerful and the weak, my cousin and the stranger, the real humans, the sub-humans and the non-humans... Such is *Vijñāna*, one could call it the structure of the structures, the apogee of the mind in the Ego.

Sitting on your rock... (assembly laughter). Sitting on your rock, you are now theorizing what kind of teaching the master is giving you while mocking you. You classify this teaching in the register of humor. Humor as a source of spiritual enlightenment and you suddenly feel very proud of your discovery. The master is awesome and you are awesome too. All the concepts, all the theories, all those "teachings" that you had only half understood, everything is falling into place wonderfully, like a puzzle that is being completed. Everything corroborates, everything is confirmed, theory and practice, what satisfaction!

***Manovijñāna.*** All this construction is already comical, but things don't stop there, because there is a last layer, the eighth, so that the Ego curls up well on itself, confirms itself well to itself as existing is *Manovijñāna*. If at the *Vijñāna* stage the Ego constructs the structured network of its thoughts, concepts, theories and beliefs, arrived at *Manovijñāna*, the Ego realizes a new reflective projection, but this time it is not naked, as at the stage of *Rūpa*, with only the weave of space and time. Now, it is the whole beautiful construction of the Ego that is taken into account: duality, temporality-memory, sensory and perceptive qualities-

forms, impulses-reactions, concepts of all kinds, everything goes there! The logical and the illogical coexist there without embarrassment. The Ego structure, at the level of *Manovijñāna*, becomes a reflective awareness of one's own mind, a strong attachment to the outcome of one's own thoughts. At this stage *Vidyā* is a blue sky, hidden by thick cloud layers.

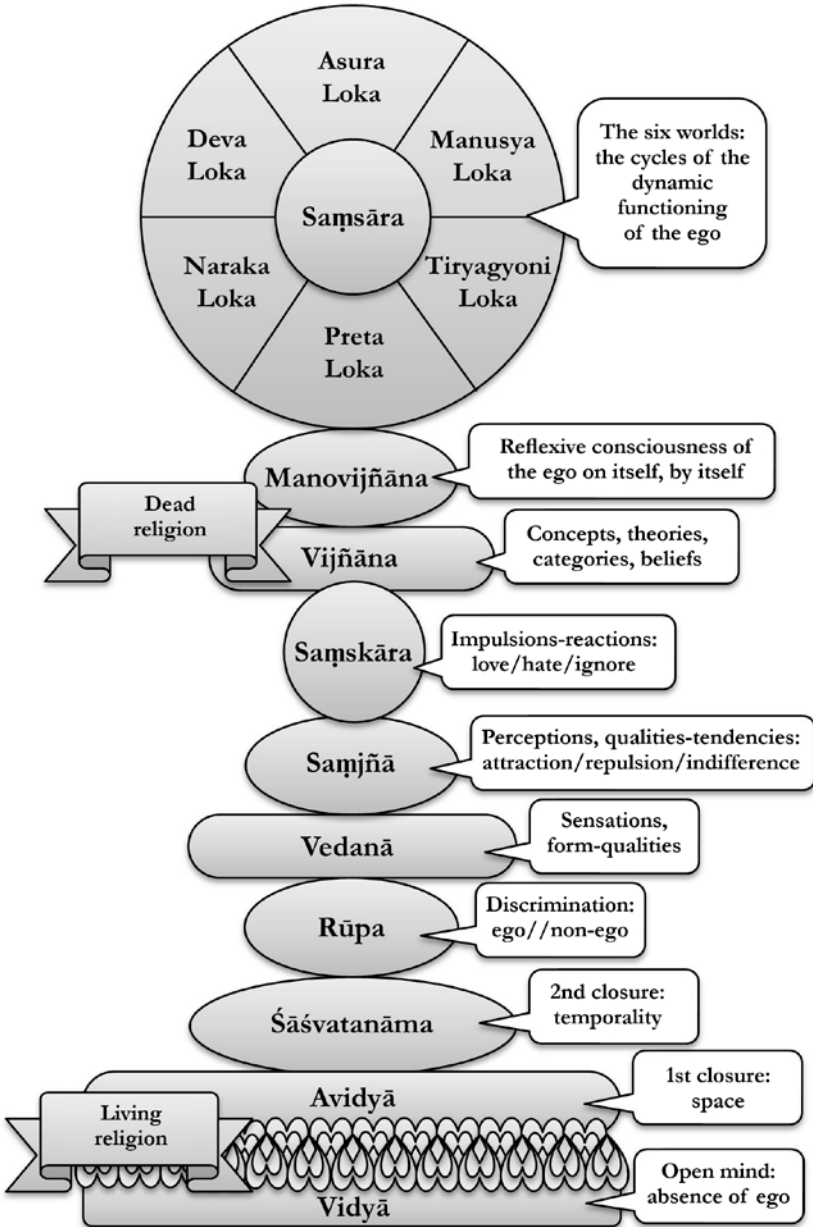
Sitting on his rock, the Ego takes itself here truly for the Buddha or something approaching. You fantasize that you are going to be able to tell all this to your friends and impress them: "So, there I was, chasing a fly during my meditation and the master started laughing at me and it was a great moment of enlightenment. That's how I experienced *Nirvāṇa*<sup>6</sup>, liberation. It was an extraordinary moment!"

This is how the Ego is built. From the primordial emptiness and the fundamental consciousness, *Ālayavijñāna*, through a series of ruptures, ignorance, tragic errors, misunderstandings, the illusory entity called "Ego" unfolds, structures itself. All its constructions are either arbitrary discriminations, or reflections of these same discriminations. Digging into space, extending and sequencing time, identifying elements, dressing them in sensations, constructing perceptions and reacting with tendencies, then developing concepts and theories, to end up conceiving the whole package as a single entity, an Ego bloated with existential sufficiency.

As educated Westerners you know that basically there is only one brain, a hundred billion neurons connected to each other. All this is organized to produce the Ego. So you see that even neurobiology agrees with Buddhism that the self is a construct, not a reality.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Nirvāṇa* is a Buddhist philosophical concept which signifies the extinction of the Ego, of the five aggregates.



*Complete system of the structure of the Ego.*



You say to yourself that it's already not bad and that we have just gone around the Ego. And yet! It is not finished! The journey has only just begun. The Ego is like a big ship with beautiful architecture and it's not just going to stay at the harbor. It will start sailing, going off to sea, to distant islands and continents. The Ego will begin to travel the seas to visit in turn the six worlds of existence described by the Buddhist teachings.

**Q.** You talked about the birth of phenomenal information. Is there a relationship with the information underlying the universe?

**A.** Not at all, and that is why I said phenomenal information. Do not forget that the primordial information which underlies the universe is in a relation of transcendence with the phenomena and the information which circulates between the phenomena.

From *Vidyā*, the fundamental opening, *Avidyā* sees emerging phenomena as so many ignorances of the fundamental opening. This is the phenomenal information, which will then unfold in the following structures, in an increasingly sophisticated and complex way.

**Q.** How can the Ego conceive of itself as an eternal entity during the second stage, *Śāśvatanāma*, when it knows it has been born and will one day die?

**A.** I am not talking here about intellectual eternity. But from the fundamental eternity of the Ego, like those little children who think they are eternal. In fact, all Egos conceive of themselves as eternal. The stock in trade of all religions, and what has made them successful since the dawn of time, is this assurance they offer to the Ego of eternal existence. Intellectually, most of us know very well that they have not always existed and that we eventually disappear. But this knowledge is too agonizing for the Ego to accept it definitively. So it designs superstructures on its own structures, metaphysical beliefs, in the form of religious systems, to which it clings, in order to convince itself that

something in it will survive forever. This belief is one of the elements that adds substance to *Śāśvatanāma*. However, the conviction of the eternity of the Ego is much more than a superstructural belief. It is, first and foremost, a fundamental structure of the Ego, a constructive evidence, the very essence of the Ego. The “I am” is eternal or it is not.

**Q.** Is inhibition, non-reaction, in *Samjñā* and *Samskāra* the same as *Vidyā*, openness?

**A.** The tendency to non-reaction within *Samskāra* is not at all equivalent to non-reaction in the original open state of *Vidyā*. Indifference is a hell of a reaction! It must be seen on the same level as attraction or repulsion. Indifference is a consequence of *Samjñā*. A neutral *Samjñā* is not nothing, it is not emptiness. It is a kind of non-choice, but it is also a choice. The choice not to choose, not to react, which is also a trend. Unlike *Vidyā*, this open, non-discriminating intelligence which, in fact, obeys no tendency. Note that *Vidyā* is not death, a vegetative state. *Vidyā* can cause non-reaction as well as powerful action. The indifference of *Samskāra* is one of the cages in which the Ego is locked up; the non-reaction of *Vidyā* is the fundamental freedom, that of the absence of Ego.

**Q.** How are “living religion” and “dead religion” situated in this assemblage of structures that found the Ego?

**A.** The dead religion emerges fully at the level of *Vijñāna*, with the appearance of the concepts, the theories, which are the foundation of the beliefs. However, it must be understood that concepts, theories, beliefs, and therefore dead religion, could never have come about without the set of structures underlying *Vijñāna*. Dead religion takes its foundations in a space and a temporality. The classic images of dead religion are the conception of a here and a beyond, which mark a space well. It is the same for time, whose eternity is marked by great founding events (such as the Creation, the advent of a prophet) and a final twist (the

arrival of God on Earth, the dead resuscitating or an Apocalypse, the end of everything).

The dead religion still needs to distinguish between the different Egos. Between the human and the non-human. Between humans too, between believers and non-believers, between believers and idolaters. Dead religion can very easily turn you from a human to a non-human. It still needs discriminations like sensations, perceptions and impulses. It is typical of dead religion to respond with such primitive tendencies as hoarding, aggression, or indifference. Also, having reached *Vijñāna*, the dead religion has all the necessary foundations to unfold in the form of concepts and theories (dogmas, beliefs, precepts).

The living religion is then to be situated well upstream of all the structures of the Ego. As much as dead religion is the religion of the Ego, so living religion is that of the absence of Ego. Living religion summons us right to the boundary between *Vidyā* and *Avidyā*. It endeavored to get rid, not only of concepts and beliefs, but also to accomplish a process of stripping, of abandonment. Because the opening of living religion necessarily implies an abandonment, a letting go. Living religion is what emerges from experience when one goes below perceptual impulses and tendencies, when one crosses the heart of sensations, when one transcends in one way or another time and space.

**Q.** Does the living religion you are talking about have anything to do with the process of Buddhist meditation?

**A.** Certainly. But not only the “Buddhist” approach. In fact, living religion concerns all “pure” and “direct” approaches to religion. In particular, all mysticisms, in the sense that the mystic is the one who makes this journey beyond (or below) the Ego, who accomplishes this act of self-emptying that living religion requires in order to commune with the Divinity. The Buddhist meditative approach is indeed an equivalent of mysticism, perhaps even more stripped down.

**Q.** Is your distinction between “dead” and “living” religion equivalent to the distinction made by the philosopher Bergson between “static” religion and “dynamic” religion<sup>7</sup>?

**A.** That’s exactly it. For the philosopher Bergson, static religion refers to superstitions, immovable dogmas, fixed beliefs and frozen precepts. It uses the “storytelling function” of the mind to create religious fiction. It refuses the anguish of death, the anguish of the emptiness of the Ego. It produces parallel universes and thrilling scenarios, in order to satisfy the Ego, to reassure it and to comfort it in its illusions of existence. This is what I call, from a Buddhist point of view, the dead religion. Dead religion seeks, whatever the cost, to destroy the opening of the fundamental intelligence which resides at the heart of the Ego and which implies its annihilation. Dead religion it is *Star Wars* in a temple or a church.

For Bergson, the mystical experience is a break with static and dead religion. Buddhism does not say anything else by inviting us to practice meditation. The philosopher speaks of “dynamic” religion in the sense of a creative force that is set in motion. The mystic no longer refers to the established system of dead religion, he creates his religion, personal, intimate, through his descent into direct contact with the Divine. As much as dead religion is a beautiful and terrible intellectual construction (this is moreover why it needs a “sacred book” at all costs to remember and harp on), so much does living religion appeal to creative intuition, to *Prajñā*. It is dynamic because it is constantly evolving, never fixed. This is the sign that one descends towards *Vidyā*, a return to *Vidyā*, the original opening.

**Q.** You often utter the words “God,” “Divine,” “Divinity.” What is their status for the Buddhism you embody? And what is the relationship of “God” with living religion or dead religion? A “living God” and a “dead God?”

---

<sup>7</sup> Henri Bergson, “The Two Sources of Morality and Religion,” 1932.

**A.** You surely know that in the Buddhist teachings, figurative expressions, metaphors are used abundantly. “God” is metaphor. We are not going to deconstruct on one side the personality of the Ego to, in parallel, build a super personality, a super Ego that we would call “God.” A super Ego which, finally, will turn out to be, neither more nor less, than a new way for the Ego to exist through this transcendent being. So, I confirm it to you, “God is metaphor!”

In the dead religion, precisely, the concept of “God...” is a concept! It is absolutely not a living experience. It is an idea of God. It is God considered at face value, in the very first degree. It’s a naive, childish belief, like believing in Santa Claus. Even the concept of “grace,” which we find in certain religions, does not really correspond to this “living” encounter, as it is envisaged in living religion. The approach to the “Divine” in living religion is completely different. Here, God is not a concept, a belief, a “faith.” God is the metaphor of the return to *Vidyā*, the metaphor of an experience of the stripping of the Ego. God is this passage towards the absence of Ego, the culmination of a deconstruction. Which is quite different from the “God,” built in the image of Man, in one or other of the dead religions.

**Q.** I seem to know about “dead” religions. It is obviously all the major religions that have a storefront. But what about living religions? What are they? Buddhism?

**A.** The dead religions are all the “great religions,” as you say, but also all the “small” religions, the various beliefs, superstitions, animisms, idolatries, magical thoughts, etc. On the other hand, living religions do not exist. In any case, not in the sense of “religion,” of systems, of institutions, as we understand them when speaking of other religions, those which are dead. I remind you in passing, but I know that you know it and that your question is just a little intellectual provocation, that Buddhism, in its fundamentals, is not a religion, even if the vast majority of those who say they are

“Buddhists” uses Buddhist thought and invented religious fictions to make Buddhism a religion. In that sense, you can put this widespread form of Buddhism among the dead religions.

Living religions do not exist, that does not mean that living religion does not exist! What we call “living religion” is an individual process and there are therefore as many “living religions” as there are individuals. Examples of living religion are found among most mystics, among the “prophets,” the revealers of the Divine. These individuals who, for some, have accomplished the process of stripping the Ego to meet the Divine (this is a metaphor) seek out of compassion to guide their fellow towards this path of interior stripping. Unfortunately, they are generally misunderstood and all their “teachings,” their metaphors of God, are interpreted according to the logic of dead religion.

Buddhism, as a living religion, strives to transmit this living teaching of the return to *Vidyā*; but it is very easy for narrow and lazy minds to transform this teaching into a theory, into a system of beliefs, and thus kill original Buddhism.

## THE DYNAMICS OF THE EGO

The Ego is thus composed of underlying structures, which can be described as compounds. Although I may have used the onion-skin metaphor, it is best to view these structures as being intertwined with each other. They are not separate, but form a structural whole, a structured amalgam: the Ego.

For the moment, we have described the Ego in a static way. However, the Ego is not static, being, like everything in the universe, subject to the principle of impermanence: everything changes, all the time. Rather, the Ego should be seen as a functioning system, so that from *Manovijñāna*, the Ego presents a dynamic of its own. The metaphor usually used in Buddhist teachings is that of the “six worlds” or the “wheel of life.” Six worlds that the Ego traverses, one after the other, following an immutable cycle. The six worlds are subdivided into three “lower” worlds and three “higher” worlds. These six worlds form the *Samṣāra*, the circle of endless desires, the realm of *Māyā*, of illusions.

### **The three lower worlds.**

*Naraka Loka*: the “Infernal World.”

*Preta Loka*: the “World of Hungry Ghosts.”

*Tiryagyoni Loka*: the “Animal World.”

**The three upper worlds.**

*Manusya Loka*: the “Human World.”

*Asura Loka*: the “World of Jealous Gods.”

*Deva Loka*: the “Divine World.”

The structure which these six worlds form must not be seen as a simple circle, a cycle, on which the Ego would turn uniformly or which would characterize the Ego in a static way. In fact, the six worlds rather form a fractal structure. By this I mean that the “motif” of the six worlds finds itself transposed to different levels of scale.

The six worlds can be one of the six existential tendencies, six destinies, six lives. One can see an entire life as marked by one or other of the six worlds. It is the most global, general level, that of an entire existence, from birth to death.

The six worlds can also be the phases of a life. A life can start in something resembling hell, a difficult and painful childhood; then continues in the human world, of a discrimination, of an analysis; and continues again in something that could be assimilated to a “divine world,” with the advent of happiness, of a blissful and peaceful life. Here we have a second dynamic level of circulation between the six worlds.

Finally, one can also consider a much finer and faster level of circulation among the six worlds during a day, from hour to hour, even from minute to minute. It is moreover at this level that the idea of a circle of desires, of the *Samṣāra*, takes on its full meaning. After a divine night’s sleep, you can wake up in the hell of duty: having to take care of your overexcited children, taking a crowded subway to go to work. But there, suddenly, your MP3 headphones on your ears, a good novel in front of your eyes, you cut yourself off from the world, sitting in a corner of the compartment. Against a soaring musical background, you read a thrilling novel that takes you



through the imagination into a pleasant, pleasant and blissful world. Then, your subway station arrives. You have to scramble to get out of the car, run to your office, out of breath, in a rush. But, once at the office, you will find friendly colleagues, your green plant, your computer screen. Or, for another, it will be to find irascible colleagues, a contemptuous and brutal manager... Perhaps, you will escape again with daydreams or function mechanically, without any feeling, in order to protect yourself, or again you will explode and assault someone. Then, the wheel will turn, the subway, the children returning from school, etc. Throughout the day you will rotate between infernal phases, great suffering, phases of frustration, painful desires, frankly stupid and automatic phases, more discriminating, thoughtful, banal phases, paranoid, envious phases or blessed, enjoyment where you have fun phases.

These three levels of expression of the six worlds are, of course, superimposed and even intricate: an Ego incarnated in a destiny of the "Divine World" type, can very well be in a phase of its life during which it experiences a true hell and in a phase of his day during which he will go through the animal degradation of recovering from the effects of consuming an illegal substance.

The Ego is not static. It is a construction in motion, a system in operation, which starts from *Manovijñāna*. What is metaphorically called a *Loka*, a "kingdom," a "world" is as close as possible, in the West, to the concept of "paradigm." It is an assemblage made up of a worldview, particular feelings and emotions, specific desires, idiosyncratic beliefs, fixed ideas, obsessions, a culture, in addition to an existential situation, in an original universe. Thus, each of these six worlds has a particular coloring.

From a dynamic point of view, now, quite logically, as the metaphor of the six worlds weaves the figure of the circle, one could consider that the Ego passes from one world to another, following the succession of worlds on this circle,

turning in one direction or the other. This is how the teachings usually describe the trajectory of the Ego among the six worlds. This is undoubtedly a didactic and simplistic version of the model of the six worlds. Because you should never confuse metaphor and reality. In fact, in reality, the Ego can very well pass between two non-contiguous worlds on the wheel of metaphor. Finally, as we are on a circle, the starting point for a description of the six worlds is also arbitrary and will depend on the pedagogical intention and the context of the teaching, first and foremost, to whom addresses teaching.

Addressing an essentially Western audience, I believe it is appropriate to begin this description of the six *Lokas* with the Human World, this world being largely favored by the way of life and cultural conceptions of the West.

The Ego, in the **Human World**, *Manusya Loka*, seeks above all to minimize suffering and maximize pleasure, in a normal, ordinary, prosaic, completely banal way of life. The passions of the Ego are discriminating, as in the restaurant, with an à la carte menu, you just have to choose. The Ego navigates between hope and fears of all kinds. One of the main concerns is owning and consuming something. It is a world that is populated by intellectualizations intended to separate the wheat from the chaff, to take a position and determine oneself. From *Manusya Loka*, it can happen that something begins to crack, especially in the management of desires. In the human world, desires are quite standardized, limited, they are desires of fashion, easily satisfied and relatively undemanding. However, things can develop unfavorably and create tension.

An important facet of the Western-style way of life fits right in with the **World of Jealous Gods**, *Asura Loka*. From its position, which could be described as “peaceful,” in the human world, Ego then enters into competition with the other Egos, in a race for excellence, for beauty, for possession. Queuing in front of a shop, from six o'clock in the morning,

to be able to buy the latest smartphone. Acquire a new high-end 4x4 model. To be younger, stronger, prettier, slimmer. Keeping up with fashion, the latest trends, being trendy, having the right look and so on.

In *Asura Loka*, Ego is very sensitive to publicity, which he watches greedily and has a great influence on him. Ego is then in a kind of prospective paranoia, he is ready to bite you to defend what it does not even have yet, but which it covets fiercely. We are there in the world of competition between Egos, of pride, of the Ego which displays itself, shows itself, parades, while comparing itself, in order to make sure of being the best, of to achieve perfection, to be the champion. In *Asura Loka*, the Ego is in permanent insecurity and it must fight to be able to have control over things, appearances, alter Egos.

Surely you all know these discussions, during evenings between “friends,” where everyone speaks for themselves and where everyone does not listen to anyone. Here, the only reference of the discourses is the self: “me by me, look how beautiful and intelligent I am.” But it is such a fragile posture that Ego must constantly monitor, manipulate and control everything in order to be able to maintain it. Inner insecurity can then be translated into self-criticism, attacks on self-esteem, Ego caressing inaccessible ideals, which it feeds on, for lack of being able to reach them.

By dint of struggles, fights, elbow to elbow on the circuit of competition, it can happen that Ego ends up reaching something, a form of perfection, it is *Deva Loka*, the **Divine World**. A culmination, a more or less grandiose achievement. Have a nice degree, a great job, a big bank account, be on the path to a prestigious career. It can still be the achievement of personal fulfillment, perfect mastery, virtuosity in a discipline. In such a world, everything is magnificent, perfect, everything is fine, it is happiness, the completion of the self, a form of paradise on Earth.

The pride of the World of Jealous Gods then gives way to pride in having achieved its ideals. Ego maintains a sort of self-hypnosis, constantly saying to itself that “that’s it,” “I’ve arrived,” “I’m there,” it convinces itself that happiness is indeed there, infinite enjoyment. Enjoyment which may not only be sensual, but also mental, because Ego then attains the pleasures of the mind, this purely mental enjoyment that the imagination, fantasies or mystical experiences provide.

However, this beautiful construction of the *Deva Loka* is fragile. All the six worlds are moreover fragile, in the sense that they are always states of the Ego, subject to impermanence. The ground of the Ego is always muddy, soft, with quicksand, even mined... The three worlds that I have just described to you are called “superior” in the sense that, globally, despite the absolute suffering, *Duḥkha*, which crosses all the worlds, they manifest some forms of happiness, realizations, fulfillment, unlike, as we shall see, the “lower” worlds. But, above all, the higher worlds offer an opportunity that the lower worlds do not offer, that of liberation from the cycle of *Samṣāra*, to be able to begin to meditate, to move away from alluring and fascinating physical and mental forms. In the so-called “lower” worlds, ultimately, there is only suffering, forms of confinement, blockage, alienation, until the stupor.

*Deva Loka* is never stable for long and the gods have to put in some effort to maintain it. And sometimes a breach can open up, if only because all perfection inevitably peaks and eventually declines. It can happen gradually, but also in a more rapid, sudden and catastrophic way. A stock market crash, your company fires you before selling out to the competition. You come back from a month-long stay in a very inspiring Indian ashram, you have attained some form of *Nirvāṇa* and you find your house burglarized and ransacked. Your teenage children begin to hate you and your partner files for divorce.

It is then that Ego abruptly tumbles into *Naraka Loka*, the **Infernal world**. The entire Divine World is collapsing in whole sections. The Infernal World can be approached by the Ego according to two polar versions: an overheated, burning hell, or an icy, frozen hell. In its “hot” version, *Naraka Loka* presents itself in the forms of anger, hatred, violent reactions, in various forms of aggression and retaliation, even suicide. The suffering is atrocious, terrible, burning. Sufferings that Ego can undergo or that it makes undergo around it. Violence then becomes a form of communication, of language, in order to be able to establish transactions within hell. And, as a famous philosopher and playwright wrote, “hell is [also] other people<sup>8</sup>.” The alter Egos all become enemies to be slain. The social contract is broken, the intimate contract is falsified, it is a deception, a scam.

In its “cold” version, *Naraka Loka* takes on the appearance of paralysis, of depression. Here, even suicide is still too hot. We prefer to die slowly, self-destruct gradually, sink, slowly but surely. It is the world of desolation, of deadly addictions, of the consumption of addictive substances and other forms of addiction, to games, to sex, to money, to others... Past happiness is bitterly regretted, while the ability to experience pleasure disappears in the present. We finally find ourselves in a kind of claustrophobia inside ourselves. We are stuck on all sides, surrounded by high, hot or icy walls, curled up on ourselves, our stomachs on fire, but our toes and fingers gangrenous from the frost.

Hell is no more consistent and durable than heaven. It can also take various configurations and Ego can now enter a new version of hell, *Preta Loka*, the **World of Hungry Ghosts**. This passage is very well illustrated with the expression “to have hit rock bottom.” As terrible, torturous as hell is, suffering, just like happiness, touches its limits: Ego touches

---

<sup>8</sup> It is, of course, Jean-Paul Sartre, with this famous line, in his play entitled “No Exit”: “Hell is other people.”

bottom. If it hasn't had an accident or committed suicide, then it can begin to examine the miserable and seedy sides of its life. And, from this examination, begin to aspire to something else, spurred on by nostalgia for past ecstasies. However, these aspirations, however noble and positive they may be, will continue to operate on the same register as those of hell. There is still far too much energy, whether hot or cold. The yearning for deliverance is wild and messy. The disappointment is still there, the frustrations still just as intense. The search for salvation is messy, a painful form of wandering, underpinned by an intense and insatiable hunger. It is for this reason that the metaphor of "hungry ghosts" is quite appropriate to illustrate and name this world. Here, complete satisfaction is impossible, frustration is permanent, the question of lack becomes crucial and tends to block both pleasure in the present and future perspectives.

And this "blockage" can very well intensify and become, in a way, an emergency exit. Ego then enters *Tiryagyoni Loka*, the **Animal World**. Having really hit rock bottom, the Ego arranges for itself a kind of retreat zone, a kind of lair, a burrow, where it can nestle and wait for better days. The animal world is the world of slumber, the hibernation of intelligence and the extinction of creativity. It's a solidified world, heavy and stupid, marked by simplistic and extreme designs. Extremes, because extremes are easy to grasp. Between the extremes, the nuances, there it is more complicated for an animal, it will tend to avoid.

In *Tiryagyoni Loka* the absence of intelligence and creativity leads to rather stereotyped functionings, one is dependent on what one knows and what one does not know. We run away from everything that is new, unknown. We are traditionalist, conservative and, at the same time, resigned. For the animal, the horizon stops just at the exit of its den and at the end of its muzzle. Beyond... ignorance is saving.

And yet, even the Animal World cannot be eternally fixed. As we have said, from the three lower worlds, an access to the

opening, to *Vidyā*, is hardly possible. The Underworld and the World of Hungry Ghosts preoccupy the Ego far too much to even sit down for a moment and take a healthy break, step back. The same is true of the Animal World, but for another reason. There, it is not the intensity of the preoccupations which prevents the process of opening from occurring, it is on the contrary the rejection of any preoccupation, the absence of any reflection on oneself, the refusal to mobilize one's intelligence and its creativity which are an obstacle to openness. Also, something is needed which, as from the outside, will restart the process of creative intelligence in the Ego at the animal stage.

This something can be an encounter with an insurmountable obstacle that even an animal cannot ignore. It takes a flick of fate, to come across an inspiring being, capable of taming the animal and bringing it out of its comfortable den. Or, more brutally, something will scare the animal away. We smoked its burrow and it has to escape by a hidden exit, it has to show cunning, intelligence, for once, because its survival is at stake. This can be a trigger.

Fortunately, it is most often the banality, the ordinary, which can make a bridge between the animal world and *Manusya Loka*, the Human World, so that the Ego finds here a way of release and a possibility of evolution. Here it is back in the small discriminations of the Human World. Instead of stupidly devouring everything that comes near its snout, it will begin to quibble in the dish, to select this or that, thus to have taste. Let's see, the Ego thinks, "what kind of coffee capsules am I going to buy? The purple capsules or the gold capsules?" And it may choose the "golden" ones, thinking that the coffee will taste better there.

We have just made a full turn of the cycle of the six worlds, of the Wheel of Life. But remember that this is only a didactic presentation. Ego can very well, for example, jump from the World of Jealous Gods to the World of Hungry Ghosts,

because, from paranoia to insatiable hunger, there is very often only one step.

**Q.** How is the religious Ego involved in the Wheel of Life?

**A.** The religious Ego being only one of the modalities of the Ego in general, there is no reason to think that none of the six worlds is foreign to it. Also, one finds similarly all the various aspects of the six worlds applicable to the religious Ego. Human, Jealous Gods, Divine, Infernal, Hungry Ghosts and Animal worlds, each present their religious version. In this regard, it should not be forgotten that the designations and descriptions of the six worlds are metaphorical and, for example, Divine World or Infernal World have nothing to do with religious conceptions of paradise or hell. The same goes for the World of Jealous Gods, which is just a way of saying it and has no relation to any pantheon.

**Q.** Could you describe the “religious” versions of the six worlds?

**A.** If you don’t mind, we could start with *Manusya Loka*. For a religious Ego, the Human World is characterized by a sophisticated yet consumptive approach to religion. This is an intellectual construction intended to discriminate between things, for example, between the religious and the non-religious, between the believer and the unbeliever, between the “pure” and the “impure,” etc. However, there is something rather routine in the religious approach to the Human World. It is a stale religion, dried up by the weight of centuries, weighed down with somewhat empty rituals, which only have the force of habit.

Which is not the case when the religious Ego enters the World of Jealous Gods. Here, there appears a kind of competition in matters of religiosity. It’s up to the one who will be the most ultra, we jostle at the door of the temple and we feel that the entrance to paradise will be elbow to elbow. In *Asura Loka*, the religious Ego is also a proselytizer, he holds his religion in high esteem and he constantly seeks to gain followers. Not that he is driven by the desire to help people,



but rather that he sees religion as a territory to be conquered, you have to be the best and for that to seduce a lot of potential followers. At the same time, it is a position that weakens the Ego and its religion, because it is at the mercy of grumps and competition. Also, the Ego feels permanently insecure: it must prove its faith, defend its beliefs, pitch in, convince; he must also appear, have the appearance and the attitude of the perfect religious. He straddles rules, taboos, etiquette and harasses everyone around it about “precepts.” In *Asura Loka*, the religious Ego has a paranoid need to know what the other is thinking and to control the other’s thought.

However, by dint of struggles and conquests, it can happen that the religious Ego reaches “paradise,” in quotation marks. It reached a kind of accomplishment, a religious perfectionism. All its family and friends are converted. It lives in a society where there is a single thought, that of religion. Everything is bathed in an atmosphere of accomplishment and kindness that is both naive and overrated. Peace and love, everyone is nice, everything is really good. In the *Deva Loka*, the religious Ego swims in full bliss, in a smooth, purified world, sanitized of all doubt, of all questioning. It is a world of proud certainties, of grandiose convictions. But that can’t last, obviously, impermanence watches...

In fact, not being from this planet, a tiny grain of sand can appear at any time and suddenly blacken the picture. It’s because maintaining a Divine World at arm’s length is not easy, happiness there is quickly laborious. Above all, perfection not being of this world, hiccups begin to appear. Your wife wants a divorce, your son prefers computers to serving the Divinity, your daughter is pregnant by an unbeliever and everything is going wrong. In addition, your supposedly anonymous activity on social networks being suspicious, the police have just seized your computer and discovered objectionable content. Your ideals are crumbling one by one, your reputation is more than tarnished and

people look askance at you. Suddenly, reality becomes particularly hostile and it seems that God Himself has let you down. He no longer answers the phone. Your life becomes a real hell and you say to yourself that this is surely a foretaste of what awaits you, after... It's *Naraka Loka*, religious version.

Hell thus feeds your thirst and hunger for religiosity. The deeper the Ego sinks, the more it aspires to its religious ideal. He clings to the branches. He begins to yearn for a perpetual quest. He needs spirituality, redemption, purification. In *Preta Loka*, the World of Hungry Ghosts, the religious Ego never finds satisfaction, for it is beset with guilt and it is so aware of its miserable sinful condition. It constantly flagellates itself, aspires to forgiveness, makes sacrifices, pilgrimages, takes itself for a martyr and desperately awaits a deliverance that does not come.

So, at the end of the line, it can happen to it to give up. It's almost the best thing that's happened to it in a long time. It abandons ideals, the quest for perfection and is content with a simplistic religiosity, without too much inspiration, but with many rituals. Do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that, follow an elementary, obvious scheme, a standard and make religious precepts the alpha and omega of all religiosity. Such is *Tiryagyon Loka*, the Animal World, for a religious Ego who has ceased all questioning and no longer knows doubt. Foolishly, it chose the extremes, the die-hard and blind principles. Even if it has to die of it, it will refuse a medical intervention that would undermine its sacred principles. The religious Ego is reduced to the rank of a well-tamed puppy, without any free will, at the mercy of an all-powerful Divinity, to which it is entirely subject.

And then, it can happen that the puppy makes an encounter, finds a form of inspiration and sophistication. He begins to question itself again and to aspire to something other than a simplistic life in the shadow of principles. And here is the religious Ego back in the Human World. From now on, it will start to discriminate again, to ask itself questions.

## THE SCARLET LAMA

We have just completed a complete tour of the Six Worlds with the religious Ego. And the religious Ego will turn thus, indefinitely...



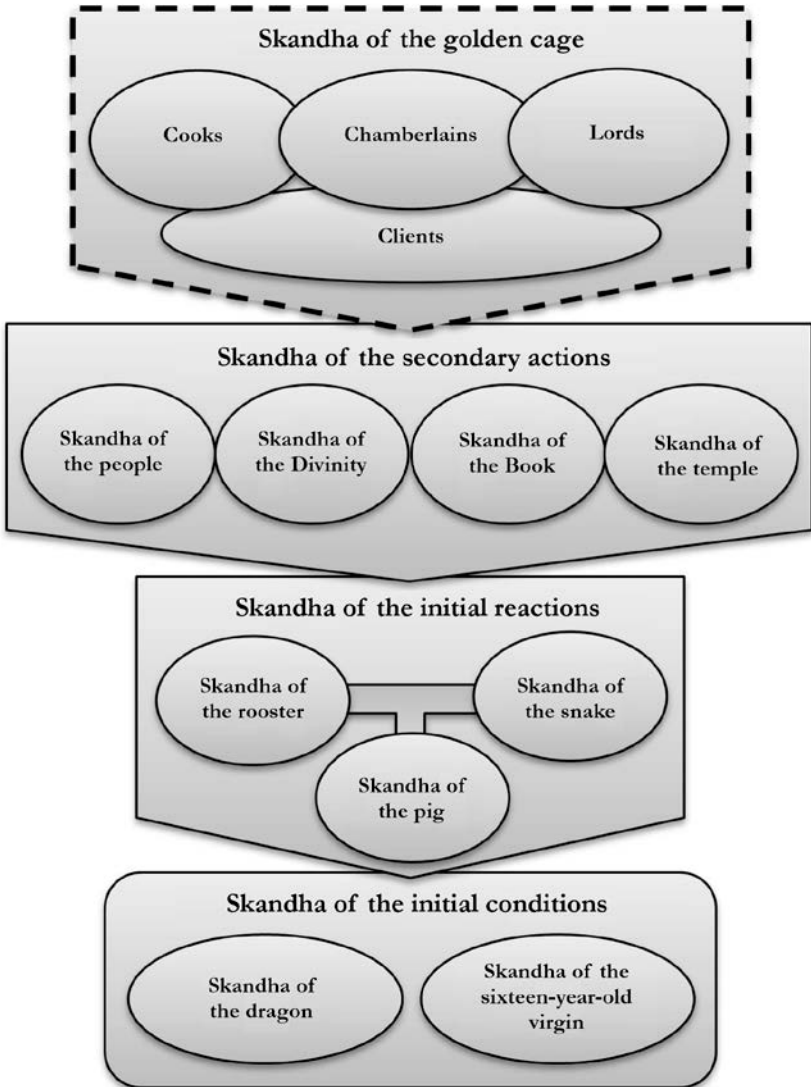
## THE RELIGIOUS EGO

We have just seen how the Ego is constructed, through its underlying structures, as if nested one inside the other and then, its dynamics, on the wheel of life, the endless cycle of *Sam̐sāra*, through the six worlds of *Māyā*, the cosmic illusion. From this all-coming Ego, which we have just examined, we are now going to attack the religious Ego, which has its particular structures and specific modes of functioning.

The description, for teaching, of the Ego in the form of different *Skandhas*, aggregates, groups of tendencies, is in no way dogmatic and immutable (what is immutable, by the way?). The five “classic” *Skandhas*, conventionally presented, should not be taken too literally. One must never reify the teachings nor take the map for the territory. Also, you may have noticed that I have already shaken up this diagram of presentation of the Ego a little by describing, not five, but eight *Skandhas*, this taking into account additional substructures, which it was good to explain.

Now, to describe the religious Ego, I am going to take the model a little and shake it up even more, in order to bring out the mechanisms specific to the religious Ego. These mechanisms exist in any Ego, whether religious or not, but in the religious Ego they take on particular importance and must therefore be described precisely in order to fully understand the nature and behavior of this religious Ego. The mechanisms that I am going to explain are therefore not

specific to the religious Ego, but are found in all sectarian or totalitarian political systems. It is these same mechanisms that develop there, or their derivatives.



*The Thirteen Skandhas of Religious Materialism.*

In this model, I will describe four great *Skandhas*, which will themselves be composed of sub-*Skandhas*: the *Skandha* of the initial conditions, the *Skandha* of the initial reactions, the *Skandha* of the secondary actions and the *Skandha* of the golden cage. Let us see what the first of these four *Skandhas* consists of.

The ***Skandha of the initial conditions*** is a kind of point of origins, the starting point of our description of the religious Ego, which founds this Ego and will lead the other *Skandhas*. This first *Skandha* is made up of two interrelated sub-*Skandhas*. It is first of all the ***Skandha of the dragon***. The dragon is an animal that is both frightening, but also mythical and whose existence is more imaginary than real. The dragon is also a hidden being, lurking in the underworld, but which can arise, at times, suddenly, and cause great fear. The *Skandha* of the dragon represents the anguish inherent in the Ego, but which is very vivid in the religious Ego. Finally, the religious Ego is an entity which, at bottom, lacks courage. This entity will end up believing in the dogmas of the religion, because fundamentally it is credulous and this credulity is the mark of its anguish.

This anguish, essentially existential, but which can be disguised under various guises, such as fear of death, fear of mystery, of not knowing, fear of the future, fear of fate, fear of impermanence, etc. this anguish is part of *Duḥkha*, absolute suffering, i.e., basic dissatisfaction with all experience. Even at the heart of the greatest of pleasures or happiness, there is *Duḥkha*. *Duḥkha* which is therefore also anguish, an irrational, general, fundamental fear. It is fear that grips the Ego from its birth, beyond *Vidyā*, the fundamental opening. It is the fear which appears as soon as you enter *Avidyā*, the first closure and which will continue to develop as the Ego is built. For the religious Ego (which is not yet in religion), this anguish is the dragon which populates its nights and days with nightmares.

The second sub-*Skandha* of the initial conditions is the ***Skandha of the sixteen-year-old virgin***. This structure is so called, ironically, because the expression “sixteen-year-old virgin” is often used in Tibetan writings to describe the hallucinations of female deities and their seductive and exciting character. This *Skandha* is that of the search for pleasure, of *Kāma*, of desire too. The desire for enjoyment. The Ego finds in the search for pleasure both a confirmation of itself (“I desire, I enjoy, therefore I am”) and a meaning to its existence, at least it has some goal to pursue. We will see that the pursuit of enjoyment is also essential for a religious Ego. It then takes on the appearance of “paradise,” which must be guaranteed in the hereafter, but which one can also strive to conquer here below.

This “sixteen-year-old virgin” story should not mislead you about this *Skandha*. It is above all a metaphor. Pleasures are of many kinds. There are those of the body, of sensations, such as gustatory and olfactory pleasures or even those linked to touch, caresses and sexuality. But there are also the pleasures of the mind, which can still pass through the senses, like music that evokes pleasant emotions. But it can also be purely contextual pleasures, in a way. For example, to be recognized as a great master, a high priest, and to enjoy this recognition, to have the Ego well inflated, even bloated, by the boundless adoration of our disciples, in addition to the many material advantages linked to this context, the comfort of life, good and beautiful clothes, abundant food, living in an idyllic setting. Also, for many religious Egos, the development and maintenance of a religious institution, with its employees and its executives, are essential to realize one’s desires, to enjoy life.

Now it is important to understand well that these two sub-*Skandhās* of the initial conditions, of the dragon and of the sixteen year old virgin are interrelated. You kinda see the picture: a sixteen-year-old virgin riding a dragon! (assembly laughter). More seriously, this interdependence means that



*Duḥkha*, anxiety, can be controlled by the pursuit of pleasure. Pleasure conceals anxiety, but it never makes it disappear, of course. Do not forget that all of this is *Māyā*, illusion, both anxiety and pleasure. One illusion drives out another...

The Ego first seeks to calm its anxieties before moving on to the pursuit of happiness. However, since the anguish is still there, the dragon is simply dozing in its cave, waiting for the right moment to arise again. This means that even in the heart of the greatest of pleasures, of the most perfect and intense enjoyment, *Duḥkha* will reappear. If you are a Christian, you are no doubt familiar with Ecclesiastes: “vanity of vanities, all is vanity,” in the sense that all pleasure and all pursuit of pleasure are vain, insofar as impermanence will lead suffering to resurface. “Vanity” must be understood here as that which is illusory and, ultimately, inconsistent.

Thus between *Duḥkha* and *Kāma* there are round trips, alternations, completions, mixtures too. One never goes without the other. This is why all of our lives are marked by dependencies and addiction. We are addicted to our objects of desire. We experience shortages, we are “in need” and that is why we become “addicted.” We want to run away from anxieties and join the “sixteen-year-old virgin” in her bed. We then begin to consume, to fill our lack, to achieve enjoyment. However, once sated, it is not long before a new lack and a new need or desire emerges. It doesn’t stop. And, oh surprise! What’s going on? This time the enjoyment is less than the last time. Because we got used to it, it’s addiction. The problem is that a virgin is only used once! So we have to “up the dose.” Now, to have the same enjoyment, we need TWO virgins! (assembly laughter).

Our life turns into an orgy: alcohol, tobacco, mobile phone, television, internet, “friends,” lovers, a continuous stream of satisfactions that end up dissatisfying us each time, because each time we experience a form of incompleteness. There it is indeed *Duḥkha* who resurfaces in *Kāma*. We are constantly overtaken by anxiety and desire is insatiable, because

pleasure is always limited. Some even enter into a sort of “loss of control,” a panic within panic, believing they can win the race for enjoyment, without understanding that the race itself is anti-enjoyment. Enjoyment is like a treadmill: no matter how fast you run, you never actually move forward. This is the state in which the Ego and, in particular, the religious Ego is, at the stage of the initial conditions. From there, from this very uncomfortable position, the Ego must react.

The Ego here enters the ***Skandha of initial reactions***. Here, three fundamental reactions are implemented by the Ego and which form as many sub-*Skandhas* to the *Skandha* of the initial reactions. Ego continued its construction, hollowing out space (*Avidyā*), unrolling time (*Śāśvatanāma*), discriminating itself from the other (*Rūpa*), filtering the real from forms of sensual qualities (*Vedanā*). Now the Ego is at the stage of *Samjñā* and *Samskāra*, with the filter of its perceptions, feelings and stereotypical reactions. The three initial reactions to the initial conditions just described are: discrimination, identification, and projection. To be able to easily describe these three mechanisms, we will use the metaphor of the three poisons of the mind (ignorance, greed and aversion) and their respective symbolic animal.

There is a sort of hierarchy, as we shall see, between the three initial reactions: from ignorance come greed and aversion, and these last two are interdependent. From discrimination come identification and projection, which are linked to each other.

The first initial reaction is therefore discrimination, it corresponds to the ***Skandha of the pig***<sup>9</sup>. The pig is a

---

<sup>9</sup> The “pig” is a traditional depiction in Tibetan Buddhist iconography to symbolize ignorance in the sense of loss of fundamental openness of mind, the shift from *Vidyā* to *Avidyā*. This symbol therefore has nothing to do with the pig symbol of impurity and secondarily insult, as it is presented in the Abrahamic religions.

burrowing animal, which rummages in the ground, or possibly manure, and which discriminates, in all this mixed matter, of good things to eat for it. There is a simple form of intelligence there. I say this because often this Buddhist metaphor of the pig is to consider this animal as “stupid.” It is ignorant, but not stupid! What the pig is unaware of is undoubtedly that the raw material is itself nourishing.

Discrimination consists first of all in ignoring the unitary, undifferentiated nature of phenomena. Then, it is a question of classifying the phenomena and of reacting to the phenomena according to three uniform systems:

attraction-love-appropriation;  
repulsion- hatred-aggression;  
indifference-inhibition-ignorance.

These three systems each have three phases: the initial impression (attraction, repulsion or indifference), the deeper feeling (love, hatred or inhibition) and finally, the reaction, the behavior (appropriation, aggression or ignorance). The religious Ego, as we shall see, is particularly concerned with these systems and their three phases. For it is from these automatic discriminations that the discriminating concepts at the level of *Vijñāna* and their subsequent organization into theories, models, dogmas, precepts, beliefs and discourses, will be forged.

From this initial discrimination, we shall forget inhibition and indifference, which lead to nothing (at least on the religious level), which are a dead end for the Ego, but a dead end that can sometimes be useful, like playing dumb to get out of a bad situation, perceiving a way out, but “wisely” not going there, procrastinating, forgetting, playing dead... Let’s focus instead on the other two discriminations-reactions: attraction and repulsion.

The sub-*Skandha* of attraction is the ***Skandha of the Rooster***. You know how the roosters are: intransigent on the question of the exclusivity of their harem of hens. And they make it known to miles around by singing. The rooster here symbolizes greed, lust, desire and thirst. But to react like this, you need a foundation that consists in giving yourself an identity: "I'm the male, the leader, here and it is I who command!" You have seen the rooster in its barnyard, with its haughty carriage, the plumed tail, its colors well displayed, its beak erect, its eyes keen, its crest arrogant, its swift and decisive gesture. We have there a beautiful metaphor of the reaction of the Ego which will feather itself with a whole bunch of attributes in order to build its identity: the identity of Ego.

Passion and greed therefore have a connection with the construction of an Ego identity. The Ego identifies with what it wants, with what it craves, and its greed is the affirmation of itself as Ego: "I am Ego! The proof: I want!," "*ego volo ergo sum!*"<sup>10</sup>. And this identity, linked to possession, you know it well, don't you? Remember what you felt and did when you bought your last car, your last smartphone, when you presented your last romantic conquest to your friends.

The second mechanism resulting from discrimination is projection, the ***Skandha of the snake***. This *Skandha* is marked by the movements of aversion, rejection and, finally, aggression which characterize it. In psychoanalysis, projection is a psychic mechanism which consists of rejecting to the exterior and applying to this exterior (the world, others) an internal psychic content, whether it is a feeling, a quality, a desire or even of a part of the Ego itself, which it refuses to see in itself. Psychoanalysis emphasizes here how this mechanism of projection is often found in the mental

---

<sup>10</sup> In Latin: "I want therefore I am." A paraphrase of the *ego cogito ergo sum* ("I think therefore I am") of the philosopher René Descartes.

illness called paranoia and in superstitions. “Jealous Gods” and beliefs, you can see that we are right in the religious field.

Projection is a very important mechanism for founding the identity of the Ego. This is why it is interdependent with the very construction of this identity, the *Skandha* of the rooster. The snake and the rooster come out of the pig’s mouth. The great specialty of the Ego in general, but especially of the religious Ego, is to imagine itself endowed with positive qualities. It is like a natural reflex that all Egos imagine themselves to be on the good side. The proof of this is in these interlocking conceptions of sin, fault, confession, self-cleansing ablution, contrition and forgiveness and absolution, which are found in all religions.

The resultant of the *Skandha* of the initial conditions, between this inextinguishable anguish and this need for infinite pleasure, is sufficiently challenging so that at the level of the *Skandha* of the initial reactions, the Ego aspires to define itself under an advantageous light. It is still an illusion, of course. No one is perfect and the “saints” are only legends. The real of the Ego is its imperfection and, in the first place, its impermanence. One gets up in the morning in a good mood. One embraces one’s wife and children with tenderness. One feels good father, good husband, good citizen and one decides to go to work, with a light heart. One almost deserve an anticipatory medal, a kind of Nobel Peace Prize!<sup>11</sup> And then...

And then, a traffic jam delays us. The very important meeting of the morning seems increasingly compromised. You begin to be tense, nervous. The lightheartedness when you got into your vehicle was totally gone. A blonde woman in front of you stalls and cannot restart. It’s the drop too many. You get out of your vehicle furious and you start to get

---

<sup>11</sup> A nod to the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the new President of the United States, Barack Obama, in 2009 in anticipation of what he could do later for peace in the world.

upset, angrily, after this poor blonde, lowering her to the ground while uttering sweeping sexist judgments about “women” and “blondes” behind the wheel. ...

In the meantime, a policeman arrives, which does not help your pig-rooster-snake mood. You start with innuendos, which he didn't hear very well, and you get to insults. The law enforcement officer calls for reinforcements and you end up at the police station. There, sobered up, you begin to realize how filthy and imperfect you really are! And this signals for you the return of suffering.

You see how important it is for the Ego to give itself a perfect identity, even if it is an illusion. The projection will help it there. Identity is keeping in oneself all that one considers good, the good qualities. And projection is to expel, as the serpent spits its venom, and to stick on the external world what is bad in itself. So that, truly, it is certain, only the good remains within.

Of course, this projection is not without side effects. It is doubly aversive, for there is first the aversion for what is supposedly bad in it and which we must get out, then there is the aversion for what is now decked out in our negativity: from now on, it is the world, the other, which is bad. And as from aversion to aggression there is only a very small step... You will confirm the bad identity from the outside by attacking it, because, it is well known, we love and we cajole what is good and we hate and brutalize what is bad, that serves him right!

The Ego has come to this when it approaches (it is a way of speaking) the third of the great *Skandhas*, the ***Skandha of the secondary actions*** . These actions are called “secondary” not in the sense that they would be unimportant, quite the contrary! They are secondary simply because they come “second” to the initial conditions and reactions. These actions are the culmination of these conditions, they flow from them and, in a way, they confirm them. They are an application.

From the characteristics of the Ego we now move on to the Ego in action. And you will see that it is not very pretty sight. Especially since, since we are in the process of addressing the question of the religious Ego, we will see that it is at the level of this *Skandha*, that the religious Ego will be able to put into practice discrimination, identification and projection. It will be able to show us how much it is pig, rooster and snake all at the same time, by building, with its own hands, this mental system that we call a “religion.”

At this point, if you remember the outline that I presented to you, concerning the complete system of Ego structures, we are well beyond the foundational and initial stages of *Avidyā* up to *Samskāra*. Here we enter fully into *Vijñāna* and *Manovijñāna*, the development of the conceptions of the Ego, their organization into theories and their application in the form of actions in and on the world, material and social.

Starting from the pig, we are going to see how the rooster and the snake behave by describing in parallel the *Skandhas* of the *Skandha* of the secondary actions, following the mechanisms of identification and those of projection, without losing sight of the fact that these two mechanisms, as I have explained it well, are interdependent and complementary to each other.

**Q.** Originally, what is the use of discrimination in the development of the religious Ego?

**A.** Discrimination pursues two goals: the fight against anxiety and the search for pleasure. And we will see that the religious Ego, with its religious system, pursues exactly these two goals. The principle of impermanence tells us well: anxiety, just like pleasure, is never definitive, immutable. The religious system only dulls anxiety without ever completely and definitively eliminating it. Likewise, the pleasures of religion are essentially ephemeral, and the promise of an eternal paradise is only a “promise” that costs nothing to the religious system that makes it. Nothing is guaranteed!

This is how the religious Ego will structure itself from the angle of the avoidance of anxiety and from the angle of the search for pleasure, here below or in the hereafter. However, these two aspects can be grouped together in a single approach that could be described as hedonic, using the term “benefit” or, to speak like economists, by saying “utility.” Utility serves as a yardstick to get an idea of a person’s level of satisfaction or well-being. It therefore brings together both the dimension of the disappearance of bad-being and access to enjoyment. This utility (as in the idea of advantage) is attached to the conception of a good or a service, which would be “used” by means of “consumption” behavior. This is absolutely, we are going to see it clearly, what happens for the religious systems, developed by the religious Ego, and which serve it as a service for managing anxiety and providing access to certain pleasures.

The religious Ego implements two great mental mechanisms which are identification and projection. With identification, which starts first with *Rūpa*, the Ego reflects itself in order to distinguish itself well from the non-Ego. This is the basis of all identification, but it is still unsophisticated, it’s just a sort of fairly crude and automatic self-non-self discrimination, a bit like an Ego’s immune system. The identification will take much more scale and complexity at the level of *Manovijñāna* and it is from there that the religious Ego will be able to fully develop.

From now on, the Ego will take on a strong identity, as a religious Ego and its belonging to a community. This identity passes through the construction of a singularity, both of the individual (who takes himself for the privileged interlocutor of a divine figure) and of his community (the “chosen people,” in a way)<sup>12</sup>. Of course, this religious identity is

---

<sup>12</sup> For Scarlet Lama, this expression “chosen people” is merely illustrative borrowing and does not explicitly refer to the “chosen people” according to Jewish tradition. See his response to a question below.



illusory, since the Ego, at the base, has no consistency. Thus, the reflection of the Ego by itself, called the identity of the Ego (including the religious identity) is totally illusory, it is an illusion multiplied by an illusion, zero by zero.

The second mechanism is projection. To get rid of its basic anxiety, the Ego projects it outwards. This projection is also part of the general movement of discrimination, since it is a question of giving form, life, existence, to this anguish by hallucinating it as incarnated among the phenomena. It is, there again, an illusion multiplied by an illusion, a way of giving an "identity" to anxiety. The projection is therefore discriminating. It defines the "friends" and the "foes" in the universe. Friends are the community of the religious Ego and all that is attached to it, including the Ego itself. And the foes, that's all the rest! Everything on which the underlying anxiety is projected.

Here appears the first of the sub-*Skandhas* : the ***Skandha of the people***. On the level of identification, this *Skandha* consists in structuring the community of men into a "chosen people," the people of the religion of the Ego, in opposition and exclusion in relation to other "non-chosen" peoples. Of course, to follow the pattern of operation of identification and projection, chosen and non-elected people are apprehended differently by the religious Ego. The chosen people are "the friend," while the un-chosen people are the "foe" or in any case a potential enemy and we have the right to be wary of them (paranoia!).

The chosen people are also charged with qualities, with virtues, which the un-chosen people do not have. The latter, on the contrary, is charged with all the defects of the chosen people, by projection. Intolerance, sufficiency, pride, vanity, sin, are always in the other, never in oneself or in self home, in one's community. The Ego lives in a community of potential angels, all the others are only demons, or dogs. In this *Skandha* one wonders even to know who is really human and who has a soul. For example, isn't the Western white

man the only one who is truly human, unlike the American Indian or the African? Apart from the white man, a creature of God, would the others be soulless animals<sup>13</sup>? Some, it seems, in antiquity even doubted that half of humanity, women, belonged to the “chosen people” of God, because of their social position totally subservient to males<sup>14</sup>. How can the *mulier*<sup>15</sup>, the soft and the weak, according to the etymology, the female, be on the side of the Divinity, wonders the male religious Ego? This is the *Skandha* of the people, the first of the secondary actions.

But, we are going to see that to be a perfect being, in a perfect, irreproachable community, holding the true truth, is not enough for the religious Ego. It must perfect and as lead to its apogee its identity. It is that the religious Ego presents quite, paranoia, the characteristic of a grandiose self. To do this, it will invent for itself, in imagination therefore, in pure imagination, a “divine” entity, a “god,” which is a sort of outgrowth of itself. It is written somewhere that “God made Man in his own image”<sup>16</sup>, but I believe someone replied that Man had returned it to Him<sup>17</sup>! Underneath this sarcasm hides the fact that the Divinity is only a human invention, a fantasy, a grandiose and grandiloquent figuration of its own Ego. This is the ***Skandha of Divinity***.

At this point, the religious Ego sides with the Divinity it has defined: It is its master, it is Its submissive slave. In exchange for this submission, the Divinity is supposed to guarantee protection, here and beyond. This Divinity is

---

<sup>13</sup> Reference to the Controversy of Valladolid, in the 16th century, where one wondered about the attitude to have vis-à-vis the natives, at the time of the first colonizations.

<sup>14</sup> Reference to the debates of Greek philosophers on the status of women (Aristotle, Plato, etc.).

<sup>15</sup> In Latin.

<sup>16</sup> Bible, Genesis 1-27.

<sup>17</sup> This is Voltaire.

decked out with qualities, such as greatness, eternity, universality, omniscience and omnipotence, infinite love and compassion... In short, everything that the Ego is not or of which it is totally incapable, but to which it refers and from which it hopes to inherit, by affiliating itself to this Divinity.

Moreover, this Divinity is conceived as absolute. Not only does Ego invent Superman in heaven, but Superman is also sovereign, totalitarian, despotic and hegemonic, a real delusion of grandeur! This is why any religious Ego is a small potential dictator. The Divinity does not tolerate any division, any compromise, It is jealous of any other divinity which could present itself. Also, in addition to its strong identity, the mechanism of projection will consist, in this *Skandha*, in imagining a complementary negative Divinity: the Divinity of evil, carrying all the dark side of Ego. The evil Divinity is the king of hell, the lord of evil spells or, more simply, the God of the other, that of the un-chosen people.

With the warlike spirit which characterizes men and religious Egos in particular, they are able to export their enmities, their hatreds and their wars to heaven! The “good” God can just as well be a unique God against multiple Gods, or the reverse, such a God against the spirits of animism or protective spirits, such a unique God against another unique God, even the Divinity against its absence, against the unbeliever, the atheist. In the *Skandha* of the Divinity the religious Ego creates champions to be able to bear the antagonism which nourishes it and gives meaning to its life. The God-champion assures the religious Ego that it is on the right side, the side of the righteous and winners. An Ego, within a community, worshiping the same God, everything fits! Isn’t it beautiful?! But wait, it’s not over...

Because It speaks! The religious Ego is a ventriloquist, it manages to make its divine puppet speak! Here we enter the ***Skandha of the Book***. Initially, the sacred book is very inspired, because it is in itself a metaphor. Someone, somewhere, had a spiritual experience, very pure, very bare,

alive. And this someone enthusiastically wanted to share this experience, pass it on, so that others, like him, could experience it. Also, metaphorically, he will speak of it as a “contact” with this Divinity and a message transmitted by this Divinity. Instead of saying “this is what I experienced inside myself and this is what I can tell you about it,” the religious Ego prefers to say “I met It and this is what It told me.”

It is also true that it has another look. To sell a car, you can associate its image, either with a beautiful blonde and sexy woman, or with a famous actor. Talking about your own experience, directly, first-hand, is not very “sexy.” Especially if you are a kind of hermit, mystical, considered a bit “crazy” by the local villagers. On the other hand, with your eyes lit up, pretending that God itself called you on your cell phone last night, that’s good!

If this first divine word is a metaphor, it itself contains many metaphors, figurative expressions, images, comparisons, fables, fictions, allegories, parables... Because what could be more difficult than to explain, to make people understand, feel, the ineffable experiences of spirituality? And Buddhism itself is not stingy with metaphors: pig, rooster, snake! Is not it?

In the beginning, the words of God were transmitted orally, especially when writing had not yet been invented. But this cannot last, because the transmitted word is volatile. As the Latins say: *verba volant, scripta manent*<sup>18</sup> and it is more prudent, at some point, to begin to transcribe the divine words into a book. Usually this is done several centuries after the founding events of the religion in question have taken place. Writing itself is spread over several centuries or millennia and, obviously, it is carried out by a large number of writers, identified or anonymous, individuals or groups, more or less informed or inspired by religion.

---

<sup>18</sup> “Words fly away, writings remain.”

This delay, this multiplicity of authors and inspirations, motivations, will pose a certain number of difficulties. Starting with the loss of the original meaning of the "word of God." Metaphors are taken at face value or misinterpreted or are subject to multiple interpretations, controversies. Moreover, over the years, the Holy Book becomes a compilation that serves those who realize it, rather than serving the transmission of a spiritual experience. Here, the confusion between the Sacred Book and a penal or civil code or even a manual of morality is classic. We then find ourselves with books that explain to us which hand to wipe your behind with, what to do when women have their period, how to wash, how to inherit, etc. Not to mention that, many interested writers have seized the Book to establish their political, economic, institutional powers and thus ensure their way of life. It is that the religious Ego is also a pleasure seeker and that a sacred Book which says what is necessary to preserve its privileges is very practical. And if the Book is not enough, then one adds annexes, exegeses, commentaries, and comments to commentaries, revisions, cancellations and cancellations to cancellations, in an almost infinite stack.

But whatever! For the religious Ego, at some point, the sacred Book becomes untouchable. For a few centuries it was adapted and expanded to serve, most often, the social and political influence of some on their fellows, then, suddenly, everything is frozen. The reason is that henceforth an institution has formed around the Book, a caste has formed. Also, at this stage, it is good to become conservative, orthodox and traditionalist from now on. When it is on the right side, that nothing changes is all the religious Ego can wish for.

The Book was then transformed into a series of rigid precepts, dogmas, immovable beliefs. This is how the identity of the Book is constituted. And this is where the projection comes into play, with the need to protect the Book and to fight the other Books or any idea that could threaten it.

The battle of the gods is transposed onto the sacred books. So it is good to speak of heresy, apostasy, heterodoxy, schism, as soon as the single thought is threatened. At this stage, the inquisition and its exceptional tribunals are set in motion, torture, institutionalized assassination, excommunications, purifying fatwas, “holy war,” “crusades” and the burning of blacklisted Books are practiced.

Where one sees, finally, that it heats up at the religious Egos. The initial sweetness of a spiritual experience, the peaceful message of Divinity, the poetic metaphors for inviting fellow to the table of contemplation, all ended up becoming a pitiful, pathetic, power struggle between Egos. Because the Egos, and the religious Egos doubtless more than the others, sustain themselves on this power. They want privileges, their place in paradise, total submission, a single thought and that no one comes to contradict them.

And it is quite naturally that the religious Ego comes to create, organize, perpetuate, in addition to its Book, an institution, a sect, a “Church,” or other groups of people recognized as being authoritative and fulfilling functions more or less elevated levels of worship and teaching within the religion. Here we enter the last *Skandha* of secondary actions, the ***Skandha of the temple***.

After having structured the people, the Divinity and its Book, the religious Ego must complete the whole system with a temple and its guardians. These can be subdivided into three categories: cooks, chamberlains and lords.

The cooks are the ones who launched the initial inspiration, the living religion. Initially, religion is alive. It is afterwards that things go wrong and that religion eventually becomes moribund and dies. As a reminder, by “dead” religion, we mean not a religion that has died out, that no longer exists (although that can also happen), but a religion that has lost its original purity, its interiority, its ability to enter in direct contact with the Divinity and which, on the contrary, puts forward the intermediaries, its dogmas and its

precepts and which, moreover, is closely involved in the affairs of this world, in what we call "religious materialism."

The cooks are therefore still inspired by the living religion, a sort of purity of soul and manners. Here, what is valid for the individual is valid for the collective. Initially, the person lives an authentic spiritual experience, an opening, an "Enlightenment." Then, in the hours that already follow or the next day, the person is in regret and nostalgia for the experience. She would like it to be prolonged or renewed. But that cannot be, quite simply because the Ego has just taken hold of the thing. This beautiful experience was a momentary absence of Ego, a pure being there, without Ego. And then, the mental reflexes are tenacious: Ego resurfaces. It is it who is nostalgic, who desires the return of the experience... "without Ego!" But it is a desire, a will, which will always block the experience. Also, the Ego will begin to ape the experience or consume drugs to be able to renew it.

You transpose and the same process takes place collectively. Initially, an individual or a few individuals carry the message that speaks of a pure experience. They are the cooks. They concocted a wonderful dish, a recipe full of inspiration, tasty and savory, truly authentic, reflecting a terroir of the soul, lovingly made, with all the good local ingredients. And then, a few decades or centuries later, it's typical, all that is lost and the era of chamberlains sets in.

The chamberlains are above all docile, while still retaining a little of the strength and passion of the cooks. But they have visibly lost the thread of inspiration of the living religion, so they are in imitation, the repetition of the same. The chamberlains are very strict about method and methodism. Certainly, they have the passion, the inner fire, but the living inspiration unfortunately fails them. They may have some mystical experiences, but in the end they turn out to be counterfeit, because they are not spontaneous, because the Ego is always there, watching, lurking in the shadows. The religion which they support, more than they carry, begins to

be less lively, to decline and to die. It is typically at this time in the life of the religion that the chamberlains begin to write a Book, in an attempt to save what was left.

For this to work, the Book must be thrilling, like a good science fiction novel. One speaks in it of cooks as legendary characters, endowed with superior qualities, which give them various advantages of being able to converse directly with the Divinity, of being able to transmit His “message,” of spreading the “good word,” of launching anathemas and to announce some sufficiently vague and sibylline prophecies so that they have some chance of corresponding to at least one event among the billions of events which will be realized in the future. Add a few improbable “miracles” to add mystery and “proof” and you get a first version of the Book.

A Book which the lords will later seize<sup>19</sup>. The lords are made up of the entire institutional clique of the finally dead religion. The lords are in the kingdom of *logos*, of the word and of reasoning. With them, the Book, which could still present, at the beginning, an inspiration quite directly linked to the original spirit of living religion, becomes a collection of dogmas and precepts, *ad hoc* legends and other nitpicking. The lords are in total “externalization:” all interior experience, all living religion, are rejected and even condemned and fought. The lords, in general, despise the chamberlains, whose message, much purer (although in imitation), can overshadow them. As for the cooks, the lords venerate them falsely, only because they are long dead and all that remains of them, finally, are words and legends, which they can accommodate as they please.

Having lost all the initial inspiration of the cooks, clinging to a vision of the universe and materialistic religion, the lords have a big basic concern, it is the fundamental uncertainty of

---

<sup>19</sup> It is indeed a constant, in all religions, to see these two stages: first the original Book of the chamberlains (to use Scarlet’s Lama metaphor), then the Book of the lords.



their system of thought. Everything, ultimately, comes down to faith, belief. They have only that, such a fragile belief. They don't even have the experience to save them. They are not at all connected to this intimate interiority with the Divinity. Their prayers and meditations are dead, cut off from reality. They believe, they have faith and rehash their professions of faith, but this is ultimately only a posture of their Ego. Not a real opening.

Faith is a rootless tree. Which floats in the air, a few meters above the ground, but which spreads its branches and foliage widely, to shade other trees and above all to give itself the illusion of its power and its constancy. Because, once this faith is posed, claimed, exhibited, the lords forget that it is only a question of a modest faith without roots. They then enter into the arrogance of those who claim to hold the universal, ultimate and eternal truth.

In the world of cooks, the message of the religious Ego is filled with openness and sincere compassion. A message of universal love and peace. The reason is that in this world the religious Ego has truly experienced the stripping of the Ego. It is an Ego of great humility and availability of spirit who then presents itself to the other Egos.

However, from the world of chamberlains, the message begins to seriously change, it becomes sectarian and proselytizing. It is heavily charged with passion and the will to convince. This exercise of the nascent religious hold has its origins in the insecurity of the religious Ego. As he has just cut itself off from the pure experience of openness, it feels structurally fragile and it needs external confirmations to feel firm and stable. For the chamberlains, the co-religionists, in large numbers, are essential to their inner balance and to the management of their anxieties.

Now, if we consider the world of the lords, the message of the religious Ego becomes hegemonic and totalitarian. It claims to meddle in everything and force societies to live according to values that are two thousand or five thousand

years old. The message thus becomes intolerant, intransigent and absolutist. If you dare to change it, if only a single comma, you risk your skin! Cooks have no enemies; chamberlains fabricate enemies; and the lords fight and put to death the enemies of religion, theirs! The lords subdivide humanity into three categories: the saints, their faithful and the others... The enemies of religion. That's why the religion of the lords always wields the sword, you know, the one that rules the nations and on which the words "love and peace" are engraved.

Because the message of love of religions is always ambiguous, which is normal, since this message is only a crust of love on a consistent substrate of intolerance. It is "love one another," but standing at attention with one's little finger at the seam of the trousers. The religious Ego has every interest in loving its neighbor as itself, otherwise... Beware of it! However, for a religious Ego, even universal love has its exceptions, because contradiction does not frighten it, nor hypocrisy, it cultivates them like an art.

It must be understood that religion is, for a religious Ego, a kind of crutch. Also, any questioning of this crutch is very dangerous and provokes violent reactions. If someone turns up one's nose or raises an eyebrow, that's it! The danger is there and immediately appears the hatred for the defector, for the one who doubts. Existential angst resurfaces, which is intolerable to the religious Ego. Like wolves, they have to howl in chorus, to drive away the anguish of the deep night.

When we have reached the level of the *Skandha* of the temple, the religious Egos split into two great categories: there are those who are in the temple and who enjoy the system; and those who are outside the temple, but who enjoy its theater and the psychology of its crowd.

The enjoyers of the temple are above all the lords. The chamberlains are just prowling around. The condition of lord of his religion is not disagreeable. Of course, to observe luxury you have to go beyond small hands, there are "small"

and “big” lords. Also, as soon as one goes up in the hierarchy, things become quite comfortable. Has anyone ever seen a starving lord? Badly dressed? Badly shod? Poorly heated? Nope! Never! Admittedly, they do not display their comfort of life in an ostensible way, the golds are symbolic and decorative, but we know very well that their cooking is not only spiritual. Being lord of the temple is a real profession, a job! And who pays!

The enjoyments are not only material, because the religious materialism concerns the pleasures of the mind as well. To be recognized, admired, adulated, respected, to arouse fear, love, adoration, to become a living idol! This is all that makes the lords of the temple enjoy. One bows to them, one kisses their hands and feet, one asks them to bless the last born and, at the same time, they can also fiddle in politics, play influence, power, public relations. Democracy, before the lords of the temple, has only to tremble. In many secular countries they have officially lost their powers and privileges, but underneath they rely on the large numbers of gullible little souls to influence votes and governments. Because there are the others, the faithful, the good flock, the sheep, the submissive, the docile, the admirers, the fans!

I have spoken to you of cooks, chamberlains and lords. But now we must speak of the others, of all those who remain, the most numerous, the you and me, the little religious Egos, the clients. They are the most numerous and they are called “faithful” or “believers.” We call them “clients” because they are just consumers in the big supermarket of religion. These enjoy the temple, with the spectacles offered them by the lords. The crowd of clients is regularly summoned to experience the excitement of meeting the lords, like a taste of Divinity. And they have all been there since the day before. It talks about God, it says its collective prayers, it sings its canticles in chorus, it makes you believe that you are bathed in love. And it bleats and wails as the procession passes, it goes into a trance, it swoons, its soul revolted, and it enjoys

all this collective fervor, like at a rock concert, a football match, and it doesn't even see that God is absent, obsessed as they are with their blissful emotions.

God is there, in you, when you are alone. From two it takes a few steps back. From three it is on the threshold of the door. From four, it breaks! So, for millions...

After the *Skandha* of secondary actions, comes last the ***Skandha of the golden cage***. The cage metaphor is often used in Buddhist teachings, speaking of the Ego as an ape, locked in a cage and panicking, shaking the bars and the more it shakes them the more they solidify, gain consistency. Here, the complex structure of the twelve *Skandhas*, stacked and associated, from the *Skandha* of the initial conditions, to the *Skandha* of the temple, results in a global formation, a huge, imposing space-time structure, a cage that encompasses the whole universe, past, present and future, here and beyond.

This structure is a cosmic cage, its bars are concepts and theories and, inside, the chosen people are agitated, with their clients, their lords, their chamberlains and their cooks. They are all there and satisfied to be there, in this huge cage, a very beautiful cage. Because they struggled to cover each bar with gilding: the "golden cage." It is a thin layer of gold which, from the outside, gives luster, a beautiful appearance, it is beautiful! Cosmic Jerusalem! Wonderful! But these are golds that only hide the underlying spiritual misery, a base and worthless metal, a kind of raw scrap, spangled and porous, subject to rust. This is dead religion at its highest stage.

In the golden cage, the religious Egos engage in a very general mechanism that we have begun to mention: **exteriorization**. This mental mechanism is made up of two associated mental attitudes: first, an ignorance of interiority and, second, its projection onto the material world, a projection which is exteriorization itself, accompanied by a real fascination for the exteriority.

The refusal of interiority is found in the setting aside of the chamberlains by the lords. The chamberlains are modeled too much by the cooks, they are too much in imitation, so that their interiority is rather developed. It is among the chamberlains that we meet the mystics, the gurus, the solitary hermits, the esotericism, the austere and rigorous practices, the meditative prayers, all things which displease the lords, because it too much calls into question their way of life, their small comfort. Also, the lords manage to remove the chamberlains, either by criticizing them, or by making them characters so out of the ordinary, strange, exotic and legendary, that it would not happen to any client to make one of them a model. The lords do a good job of making clients believe that interiority has something sulphurous, dangerous and, in any case, that it is inaccessible!

The refusal of interiority is found precisely in religious teachings. They contain absolutely no knowledge of the path of interiority. These are legendary tales, punctilious precepts of life, fantastic dogmas and beliefs and, on the practical side, the clients are taught, at their choice: the "incantatory prayer" (repeating ready-made formulas, such as mantras, magic incantations), the "request prayer" (asking for something for oneself or for others, as one orders toys from Santa Claus) and the "punitive prayer" (again in the incantations, but this time, their turn and the duration of their repetition are supposed to penalize us in compensation for our sins). Clients are invited to attend worship as a distressing spectacle, an empty ritual where they do nothing but gymnastics (sitting, standing, kneeling, on all fours, joining hands, etc.) and repeating what is tells them to repeat, sing mantras or hymns, go into trance or ecstasy and believe that all this leads them to "God."

There are two kinds of externalization in materialistic religion: external externalization, with the four *Skandhas* of secondary actions: the chosen people, the Divinity, the Book

and the temple. Religion is then “materialized” in the universe. And internal exteriorization, in the golden cage, with the animist forms of prayers and meditations, far removed from letting go, from slipping into emptiness. On the contrary, the interiority thus “exteriorized” becomes a fascinating intimate theatre, a perpetual agitation of the mind, our neurons put on a pretty puppet show for us.

The teachings are therefore spiritually poor in materialistic religion. This is the lowest level of religious teachings, the one addressed to small children who are easily impressed and amazed. In any case, there is nothing concerning the way of a spirituality worthy of the name. Nothing concerning interiority in the sense of a descent inside oneself, of a setting aside of the material world. Just think, too much spirituality among clients could kill the alms that feed the temple! Clients, having become autonomous, would also risk turning away from the lords. The business would then be in danger!

Exteriorization can also be recognized by the gilding, the conspicuous display of religious signs and symbols. The dead religion must have tinsel, the golden cage must be gleaming. All that one does not have in interiority it is necessary well to display it outside, it is hypocritical, but it is necessary for the religious Ego. It is also a form of rampant proselytism: to make followers by imitation, monkeyry, because for the religious Ego the number of sheep in the herd compensates for the poverty of each sheep. But one is entitled to wonder if a billion beggars make a fortune...

The Divinity itself is not spared in this movement of externalization. God is identified with all material via symbols: God is a temple, an ordinary building, a heap of arranged and concreted stones; God is a statue, an artistic representation; God is a text, a Book; God is the hierarchy of lords, even one of the lords or even a cook or a chamberlain; God is a ritual, a sacrament, a ceremony; God is a garment, an adornment, a trinket, a headdress, a charm; God is a parallel

world, a paradise, a tall and bearded old man; God is in the movies, it's Morgan Freeman, I met Him! And He signed an autograph for me (assembly laughter).

God is a supposedly abstract idea, but so personified and humanly consistent that its abstraction is itself a pure abstraction, so that the abstraction of this abstraction finally becomes a beautiful intellectual concreteness. Thus, the Divinity is entirely "exteriorized," materialized, which is found in everyday language where "God" is misguided in all the sauces of popular expressions.

There are different kinds of idols: object idols (statues, carvings, an amulet, a mountain, a natural phenomenon, a Book); living idols (an animal, another human being, even an "alien"); and idols of the mind (a conception of God, a fantasy). Although these idols are different, the underlying mental process is the same: the externalization of Divinity. And the idol of the mind itself does not escape it, because the concept of God is then projected on the world, It is everywhere, certainly, but It is. Which is too much. It is always comical to see the religious Ego accuse another religious Ego of idolatry, when all are idolaters insofar as all externalize Divinity in one form or another. It is for this reason that one is always someone's idolater.

The religious Egos make us think of these little children of three or four years old, the pacifier in their mouths, a comforter under each arm, just in case... You never know... The world is so scary! Mom's skirts are so reassuring! But who would ask a little three or four years to have a bit of courage?

The clients of the temple have a great need of chamberlains and lords. And they need all this exteriority of materialistic religion. It would be very difficult for most clients to drop all that religious theater and go to their intimacy, their interiority and try to follow the solitary path to Divinity.

The worst of exteriorization, in matters of religion, is the instrumentalization of religion for economic ends, for

political power, to support an armed conflict, or even to found a state, a nation. Religion is then summoned to support the worst inclinations of humanity. It is used to justify dictatorships, violence, declared wars or terrorism, as well as racism and the various forms of apartheid. Religions are “racist” because they constantly manipulate the categories of “pure” and “impure.” All racisms are based on this discrimination, both moral and sensory “pure/impure.”

The other, first of all, it smells bad. It is the animal reaction of the religious Ego, it is the religion of the rhinencephalon. The other is the dirty, the untouchable, we must not approach him, let alone touch him. One will not share one's meal with him, one will not enter his home, one will not even speak to him, for fear of soiling ourselves with the sound of his voice or his ideas. Thus, for all religions, with a few exceptional exceptions, seeing an infidel enter the temple is the worst horror.

Religion serves the hold on minds and bodies and the “golden cage” ends up being incarnated in societies, to rigidify systems of constraints, to maintain the privileges of the lords, teamed up with the strategists of orthodox, traditionalist, conservative politics, because, of course, those who have the power and the privileges want to keep them. Materialistic religion thus becomes the source of all hatred and its so-called message of love and tolerance is nothing but a pathetic imposture.

Materialist religion functions on the same level of claptrap as crooked politicians on the campaign trail: same populist promises, same demagogic rhetoric, same eschatological threats, same esotericisms of the elite opposed to the crowds of bleating sheep.

The religious Ego lord makes religion a means which he puts at the service of the materialistic interests of this world. He uses the inspiration for the Divine and the blessings of prayer to dominate the smallest of the religious Egos. This lord then uses the chamberlains as a advocate, champions to



admire, but above all not to imitate! This lord uses cooks and the Book of Good Recipes as an ersatz of spirituality, like the trafficker cuts drugs to get more profit. The lord thus waters his credulous little clients with his adulterated, watered-down, polluted religion of materialism, but so shimmering, picturesque, spectacular and hallucinating!

The religious Ego is thus marked by mechanisms of externalization of the interiority, derived from projection. This means the refusal of any interiority by the religious Ego and that all the interior must be externalized. The religious Ego perceives interiority either as a dark and agonizing world, or as a boring and uninteresting world. Also, it prefers to indulge in rituals, ceremonies, social exhibitions, religious pomp and trappings, the world of appearances. The religious Ego feeds on all the tinsel of lords and temples, of beautiful golden statues. It is very sensitive to collective atmospheres, to the outpourings of the crowd and it then takes its emotions and its trances for a contact with the Divine. This without realizing that its group emulations are on the same register as a political meeting, a football match, a rock concert or a military parade.

And even its “contact” with the Divinity is externalized in dead prayer. Prayer is for it a kind of smartphone, connected to a network, with which it believes it can send messages, queries and other solicitations. The religious Ego has thus lost all contact with its inner self and the Divine which is hidden within that self. Richly nourished by its materialistic religion, the religious Ego has abandoned the path of sobriety, in favor of beautiful superstructures that are very cumbersome, but so fascinating!

At stage of the *Skandha* of the golden cage, materialistic religion is, in fact, very “mechanical.” Five prayers a day, every Sunday at mass or at the temple once a year. It is the god of clocks and calendars. From time to time you have to wind up the clock, fill the clepsydra. It is the accountant God,

the God of indulgences for sale, paradise sold on credit, with monthly payments. This is the *Deo Economicus*<sup>20</sup>.

You can also find religious gadgets on the market, such as prayer wheels. We extend our hand, a small gesture and presto! Thirty prayers sent into the ether, effortlessly! Take the small model, the one that spins like an infant rattle. You send prayers all the time, it's easy, you can mentally list your shopping for the week or call a friend at the same time and what's more, it's fun! You can even send prayers to God over the internet or by email. Don't know the address? "god@heaven.com" is easy to remember (assembly laughter). You can send one or ten emails a day or download a program that will send a million emails a day to God on your behalf. Effective, isn't it? Unless God has a great anti-spam filter... He would be right!

The God of materialist religion is also the God of easy little arrangements, between friends, with morality. A little confession and presto! A little ablution and presto! All our sins are blotted out. It's as easy as rebooting your computer: Ctrl+Alt+Del. The system beeps, the RAM is erased and you have regained the peace of mind of the innocent. Everything is forgiven, it's white paw to discuss with God in all familiarity, like two old friends.

I spoke to you about the forms of constraint, of totalitarianism, specific to materialist religions. However, the best way to establish one's power over one's fellows and already to ensure easy power over a good half of humanity: women. It is for this reason that all materialistic religions are patriarchal and macho, religions of males, made by males, for males.

The human male has always struggled with his sexuality. Moreover, it is a problem that the male does not want to face, does not want to consider, or deal with. Because, for the male, the pride is strong, the erection fragile. Also, the male realizes

---

<sup>20</sup> The "Economic God," in Latin.

a kind of “break,” “cut,” in his mind, by ignoring the problem for himself and by “projecting” this problem on the woman. It is a fairly general mechanism of attribution that is supported by macho religious systems: the irrepressible sexual desire of the male becomes that of the woman, so that it is the woman who must bear the full brunt of sexual repression, while the male reserves the right to succumb to his desires. Here we have the fundamental hypocrisy of all machismo.

For the macho male, the woman is not a human being like any other, she is a bearer of a symbol, she is an anti-phobic object. The hidden, submissive, belittled, alienated woman is a means for the male to get rid, on the outside, of the internal conflict with his sexuality, his sexual desire. In doing so, he carefully avoids turning to the inner dimension of his sexuality and the crucial question of the control of desire: instead of striving to control his desire, the macho man controls his environment, via the control of women. Machismo thus surfs on the process of religious exteriorization.

Imagine that one of your neighbors is suffering from paranoid madness: he is in fear of being attacked by his neighbors. And, instead of seeking treatment, accepting psychiatric hospitalization, which would be a process of internal control of his anxieties, he asks all his neighbors to stay at home, with the shutters closed (you never know... the paranoid thinks). Another, more comical image is that of this pianist who moves a grand piano weighing several hundred kilos, instead of simply moving his stool forward!

One of the ways of resolving the sexual conflict necessarily involves the “spiritualization” of sexuality. This is the path of all sexual tantras. It is about getting out of the tyranny of desire by dissolving it in forms of yoga, meditations and rituals. It is also a way of taking responsibility for one’s own desires and refusing the too easy “projection” of this desire onto others, in this case, for the

macho male, renouncing to make women bear the weight of his own desires.

We know that the projection mechanism is specific to the functioning of the religious Ego: it is a question of dividing the world into “friends” and “foes” in order to be able to project one’s anxieties onto the latter, the enemies. Now, there is nothing more spontaneous and, I would say, more practical, than to make women the enemies of males. After all, they are there all the time, around us, in our lives, so they are the ideal domestic enemy. In addition, weaker muscularly, encumbered by their pregnancies, alienated by their education, they are easy prey, all found, of macho projections. Here, it is the sexual anxiety of the male, linked to his uncontrolled sexual desires, which finds some relief through the mechanism of macho projection.

Then, it is quite natural that religions take hold of this mechanism, which is exactly in the same vein as their mechanism of projecting existential angst. Machismo and religion are two tyrants who find benefit in associating, which explains their closeness, in fact. We also know that materialistic religious systems always support the tyrannical powers of politics. Now, for an absolute king, a dictator, a national tyrant, the work of submission is already half done if one half of the population is first submitted to the other. The tyrant only has to dominate the little males, the domestic tyrants, who already dominate their daughters, their sisters and their wives! Thus, a macho, sexist religious system is welcome in the realm of tyrants. Note that the same alliance of interests can occur with a macho secular system as well.

**Q.** Could you tell us more about the links between materialistic religion and racism?

**A.** All religions exhibit some form of “racism,” discrimination, whether that racism is overt, explicit or hidden, underlying. This is especially the case when religion mingles with politics, is listed on government-issued identity

cards, when it is married to the state, as the state religion. Even religions that claim to be “universal” are basically racist, because their absolutism forces them to discriminate between, for example, believers and non-believers or heterodox believers or believers of another religion.

Thus, most religions support a latent discrimination, which does not say its name, if only the basic discrimination between “faithful” and “infidel.” Of course, we will be told about laudable attempts at ecumenism, at inter-religious “rapprochements” or with atheists and lay people. Except that it is most often about postures, summit meetings, media coverage effects, but certainly not a fundamental openness to others and to difference. Openness that would require a prior humility: doubt about one’s own faith, religious relativism.

However, from the point of view of the religious Ego, this fundamental intolerance is quite normal. A religion is a representation of the world, of the universe. A kind of language. Imagine a text that would mix words and syntax belonging to several languages. It would be completely incomprehensible. A true ecumenism would lead to achieving a common, shared, comprehensible and comprehensive position on a vision of the world and beyond. Impossible, since each religion is a representation of the universe which does not admit any other representation, which is totally exclusive and egocentric, not tolerating any mixture, any questioning. It is the very characteristic of dead religions to want to arrogate to themselves the exorbitant power to define the universe. They claim to define at the same time the path, the stages of the journey and the hotel of arrival. In doing so, there is no room for any openness to the other. Here we have the basis of all discrimination, of all “racism,” in dead religions.

**Q.** You spoke of “chosen people” concerning the mechanism of identification at the base of the religious Ego. Is it specific to Jews?

**A.** Of course not! The concept of “chosen” or “elected people,” even if it is very connected with the Jewish religion, is not a feeling specific to Jews. Most religions are built on this idea of choosing their community. This, moreover, is the basis of all proselytism and “evangelization:” convincing or compelling the other, different and so-called “misguided,” to enter the elected community. There are, however, some commendable exceptions to this spirit of exclusivity among a few Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and followers of Sikhism.

**Q.** Why do we observe these links between machismo and religions?

**A.** It is true that it is an anthropological constant: all the major religions are basically macho. It is said that Buddha himself took a long time before accepting an order of nuns. However, machismo is embedded in human beings, long before, one might say, the religious fact itself. There is a kind of animal atavism here. In any case, the religious systems have inherited from them or have been inspired by them, because they were generally created by males and they are led by males. Even if we also observe priestesses, particularly linked to the cult of female deities, the place of women in religions is most often incidental and often it is not to have the best role. One thinks of these “deified” young girls who are, in fact, sacrificed to serve often a hypocritical religious prostitution.

Nor does any religion have a monopoly on machismo, even if some claim it more than others. Reading the “sacred texts” shows that the place of women is always pejorative and inferior. She is always loaded with guilt, contempt and always considered as the slave of the male, the male being the slave of God. There cannot be, for religion, two egalitarian beings, equally turned towards the Divinity. It is necessary to establish a hierarchy, the last rung of which, at the very bottom, just above the animals, is the woman, the second the male, the third a representative of God on Earth, and the fourth the Divinity itself.

The links between machismo and religion can be understood according to the two causes of religions: firstly as tools of discrimination: between believer and non-believer and often between believers themselves, even when they are of the same religious origin. Discriminations again between the here below and the beyond, between the human and the non-human, between the male and the female.

Secondly, religions also have the function of providing advantages, "utilities," for all believers in the beyond (it costs nothing to make people believe it!), but especially for some here below, in the material world. It is a part of religious materialism: material benefits on Earth in this life and phantasmagorically derived material benefits in the hereafter. This is what also explains the acoquinements of religion with the profane, secular power, politics, kings and the armed forces. It is a well-known mutual parasitism: the religious justifies the prince (in the name of God, by divine right) and the prince protects the religious (to serve God). An exchange of good practices, as long as everyone stays in their place, of course! To dominate, to have power, the best way is to have a finger in the stomach and a finger in the head of your fellow. The history of religions shows us that this was very quickly understood and implemented.

Religious systems are enterprises like any other, whose front goals are the salvation of believers and the hidden or disguised, underlying goals, the exploitation of believers for one's own advantage. However, the very first advantage to be drawn from religion, for the male confronted with his problem of sexual desire, is a domestic advantage, on the basis of the justifying religious ideology: subjecting the woman to the sexual desires of the male.

Transposing it, we could say that every macho male is both prince and priest, exercising his power over woman by his strength and justifying it by his religion. We are there in the superstructures of the religious Ego, from *Vijñāna* and *Manovijñāna*, which constructs its little *ad hoc* theories to

control the female half of humanity, reduce it to the rank of slave and set it up as a self-justifying divine prescription, which loops the system on itself, to the point that the slaves themselves often approve of their alienation. A religious Stockholm syndrome, in a way. Divine world for the male, infernal world for the woman, such is religious machismo.

**Q.** Why is religious machismo violent with females? I am thinking of confinement, bans on schooling, on work, domestic violence, disadvantageous laws, trivialized rapes, sexual mutilation, etc.

**A.** Religions are the persistence of a law of the strongest, inherited from animality, and clothed in concepts. There is no longer any need to hit his wife to submit her, it suffices to make her integrate the religious paradigm which makes her consider herself an inferior slave and submissive to the male. All this being a matter of education, as we know, the best thing is to do it as soon as possible!

But since all this is fundamentally false, it is a cosmic lie! Women are human beings like the others, in particular, like the males! Also, if it was not remedied in one way or another, the machismo would not last very long. The “freely consented” measures of repression, from the childhood of little girls, later among young women, are all intended to establish a balance of power “male winner-female loser,” in order to be quite certain that there is congruence between social and family reality and religious theory. We have here a formidable system of generalized “brainwashing.”

Of course, like everything human, one cannot generalize one hundred percent. You will always find, here or there, today or yesterday, exceptional exceptions, anecdotal powers. Basically, a woman socially considered a minor under guardianship, but who has power over her children, her own slaves and her pans! We must not forget either the Protestant or Reformed Christian churches, in which women have their full place, just like men. Like what, a religion without machismo is quite possible.



**Q.** Why is machismo also found in sects and totalitarian political systems? The emphasis on virility and the withdrawal of women?

**A.** The answer is very simple. To be able to maintain such systems, whether religious, sectarian or political, ultimately requires physical force and emotional violence, that is, the capacity to be violent, cruel, without failing. And this physical force and this violence, we find them typically in the human male, much less in the female. I'm not harboring any gender bias. Whether organic or the result of an education, it doesn't matter, the result is there. Look around you, look at history: repression, violence, torture, rape, crimes against humanity, wars of all kinds, these are indeed the acts of men, of males, very rarely of women.

When a totalitarian system is about to go to war and wants to show its muscles to the whole world, there are parades, for the most part, of virile men, who walk like puppets, between tanks and missile launchers. And, nowadays, even if the great established religions no longer take up arms, their ambient machismo guarantees the "virility" of their positions and the maintenance of a pro-male tradition.

If these systems really advocated openness to others, communication, gentleness, acceptance, tolerance, etc., they would not need to highlight the human male. Religious virility is above all symbolic, but it permanently supports religious machismo. A "prophet" yes, but a "prophetess?" She's crazy! A Pythia whose priests, still males, must interpret the words to make them understandable.

You can imagine the Vatican invaded by fifty percent women! Transpose the same thing to Muslims or Jews, imagine the revolution! This is indeed the sign that we are dealing with frozen, ossified ego systems, in a disguise of reality, a travesty of reality, in order to perpetuate forms of pernicious and parasitic religious Ego, prejudicial to at least half of humanity, if not all!

**Q.** Why should religious Egos be led inwards?

**A.** Your question is interesting, because it is that of all the cooks who, on the threshold of their interiority, have asked themselves the question: what's the point? Access to interiority is difficult and exteriority is so fascinating and full of promise. Besides, the interiority is a bit too... "austere!" Also, it is easier to teach a form of interiority, pseudo exteriorized interiority and talk about heaven and hell, the carrot and the stick.

And yet... Cooks always end up teaching interiority, it's stronger than them, they can't escape it, they have to do it! The reason seems mysterious, but it is not so complicated to understand: the interiority is so true, authentic, so inspired, that it spreads all by itself and touches everyone around. This is how things happen during the cook's lifetime. It is afterwards, as you now know, that things go wrong...

That said, our time is undoubtedly special, because there is a kind of urgency to lead the religious Egos towards their interiority. Globalization and the Internet are transforming the planet into a vast rat race of religions, with serious risks of misunderstanding and violence. A violence linked to the susceptibilities and sensitivities of each of the believers in their materialist religions. Also, for this need for the exteriority of religion, it is important to substitute a culture of interiority, because interiority is the same for everyone. On the path of interiority, there is no longer any differentiation between men (or women), because this path is unique and one is there all alone.

**Q.** What is, finally, the common point between all the materialist religions?

**A.** Do you know what is the most striking symptom of the religious Ego as the inspirer of all religions and beliefs? The division. If there existed a true divine, unique inspiration, there would not be so many and systematic divisions within the religious currents and within the assemblies of religious Egos. It is that whenever a great religious Ego produces a

teaching, a doctrine and a practice, it will always find a beloved disciple to reverse things, create its Shiism and another current boasting even more authenticity with Divinity? Where we can clearly see that all religions are, above all, a matter of Egos. This is their common point: an Ego to feed.

**Q.** From the point of view of the interiority/exteriority relationship, can we speak of a difference in approach between East and West?

**A.** Most certainly. In the West, the chamberlains were gradually ousted, set aside and it was the small and large lords who seized spiritual power, with a strong externalization of religion in all its aspects. Whereas in the East, whatever the religion, be it Christians, Sufi Muslims, Hinduism, Buddhism and so on, the lords are practically always in the background, while the chamberlains here are the true bearers of a living spirituality. In India or Tibet, two countries that I know very well, there are indeed Brahmans or monks, but the true “spirit” of the religion passes above all through the gurus, those who embody the path to the Divine. However, there are also forms of externalization here. Between the cult of gurus, that of icons or other “representations” and beliefs in the divine incarnation, all of this is indeed an exteriorization of interiority and a reinforcement of religious Egos.

**Q.** You talk to us about “Divinity,” about “God,” do you believe in God as a Buddhist?

**A.** I use the terms “Divinity” or “God” as symbols of openness, but not as those externalities, psychic idols, imaginary characters, usually understood in those terms. Buddhism, at its core, is not a religion and does not profess belief in a deity or a God, or even in a “Buddha” or “Buddhas.”

Siddhārtha Gautama, known as the *Shakyamuni*, well known as “Buddha,” “the Awakened,” never claimed to be a deity. He was just a mere human, mortal, among other human beings. Today, there is a memory of a human being

who lived, experienced openness, admirably taught this openness and the path that leads to it, but who is now dead, gone, returned to nothingness. The worship of the Buddha or Buddhas is therefore an error.

I therefore use the terms “Divinity” or “God” as a pole extended to religious Egos, to speak to them with what they already know, to give them a sort of approximate translation of what is totally beyond them, at the start: opening, *Vidyā*. Let them first go on the path of openness believing that they will meet their God there. Thereafter, they will have plenty of time to realize the phantasmal, chimerical, fantastic, fictional sides of this “Divinity” and let it melt and disappear in the limbo of childishness. God is only the puppet of our desires and hopes. Just a fantasy. Grandiose and pathetic at the same time.

**Q.** As a “Tibetan lama,” would you say you are a cook, a chamberlain, a lord or a client?

**A.** A person’s identity is often what others decide through their projections. You probably see me as a chamberlain, a kind of “guru.” In any case, my Ego will never dare to claim to be a “cook” (assembly laughter).

As a lama, as a monk, in my youth, I was “lord.” A very small lord, however, with sometimes “chamberlain” periods during my spiritual retreats. And, subsequently, the circumstances of my installation in your country meant that I became a simple client. This is how I see myself: a small client of the inner path. But who sometimes takes himself for a chamberlain too! The proof! I am there in front of you to teach you. But really, I’m just a client and I have no other ambitions. To be “nothing” is the healthiest of ambitions for an Ego.

## **BACK TO LIVING RELIGION**

If the non-religious Ego is a monster of egotism armed with a simple slingshot, the religious Ego is a monster of egotism armed with an atomic bomb. Because in this kind of religious “delirium,” the eponymous Ego gathers, excuse the little, the universe in its entirety, infinite and eternal! Realize the size of this Ego! Its presumption is disproportionate, its power exorbitant, its arrogance boundless. With the religious Ego and its golden cage, we touch the pinnacle of “egoity.”

Also the return to a living religion, which will require the abandonment of the dead religion, is a revolutionary and fatally dangerous subject for any religious Ego. There is so much to lose! Tear the comforter out of the hands of a toddler, you will see the result. It is that religion, dead religion, fills an enormous number of needs proper to this Ego. The deception would not last for so many millennia if there had not been, underneath, great stakes for each generation of “believers.”

The fundamental problem of any materialist religion is that of a “fundamental error:” at the start is the thought of the religious Ego (and we will see the reason for this thought), then, this individual thought, made up of conceptions, ideas, theories, beliefs, is spread out of the Ego, towards the alter Egos, variously in the form of oral accounts, writings, symbols, practices or material things. And all this spreads between the religious Egos and endures, since all this

is transmissible between the generations of Egos. And the fundamental error consists in this “forgetting” that, at the start, everything was “only the thought of a single Ego.” The pure fantasies of a single Ego. And that is how thought incarnates in the world in the form of religion and how religion takes this materialistic turn.

Human beings are animals with very specific needs: these are the needs of their mind. We observe this very well from the childhood of this being, but it lasts, in fact, all his life. For example, the human mind has a thirst for contrasts and marriages between opposites, which leads to pleasurable excitement. The human mind loves “pretend” and other simulacra. He likes new and unexpected intuitions, surprising and original things. The human mind builds ideas and beliefs, but it also likes to overthrow them, especially if they are well established. Human beings need exciting situations and events that give them shivers, especially when it comes to sexuality, birth and death, violence, catastrophic events, fundamental taboos. The human mind thirsts for emotions through empathy and identification, it needs heroes or vile creatures, fictional beings, to incarnate through the mind. Because the human being, the human animal, has this unique characteristic on this planet, that of a need for imagination and fantasies.

This explains the invention of religion: it is a question of inventing a system of conceptions and practices capable of satisfying all these needs of which I have just spoken. Materialistic religion is only for that. You thought it was a bridge to Divinity? But this is an error. Materialistic religion is not a path to Divinity. It is only a fantastic scene of an interior movie, projected onto the material world and shared with all the hallucinated people on Earth.

Thus, the human being “forgets” that all this is only a pure invention, a pure product of his imagination and this forgetfulness thus leads the human to “incarnate,” externalize, all his fiction, all his imagination, in the form of

“serious” beliefs (equivalents of delirium) and practices and quite material things.

All this “materiality” of religion includes beliefs, dogmas, ethical precepts, symbols, sacred books and their stories, rituals, architecture, costumes and dress practices, culinary practices, “sacred” objects and so on... The whole process takes place in three stages (but you have to see them as intertwined).

First, the human faces serious problems which, having no immediate solution, generate in him a lot of anxiety. First of all, the question of death, of one’s own death, of this inadmissible reality of the disappearance of the Ego. Then, come great abstract enigmas, but which have very concrete consequences on the way of living and are, themselves, sources of anguish. These are the big questions about the purpose and meaning of life, the meaning of death and the hypothetical prospect of a “beyond death,” and the nature of the universe, ultimately. The human being thus thinks of all these questions and these problems and not being able to immediately find a solution to them, to fight against the anguish which assails him, he sets in motion mental mechanisms other than those which consist in finding a rational solution to the clogged sink problem.

The second step is for the mind to take hold of all these problems, all these painful questions, in a different way, for lack of being able to deal with them in an exclusively rational way. Then, the human being becomes “Religious Ego” and he uses these needs and gifts in imagination to create his materialistic religion, his dead religion. For this, this Ego will create beautiful and exciting phantasmagoria and it is, in the first place, all this excitement which will come to thwart the underlying anxiety.

The first imaginary movement consists in creating an idol for oneself, whether in the form of a statuette full of magical powers or whether it is an interior idol, an “idea of God” transformed into an interlocutor. Then, the system will begin

to develop in the form of mythologies, legends, all of which attempt to resolve the big questions, either by denying them (for example, death does not exist, the human soul is eternal and there will be a reincarnation or a resurrection), or by giving them a ready-made answer, a "belief" (the universe was created by God, the purpose of life is to deserve a paradisiacal afterlife with the Divinity, the morality is of divine essence, etc.).

Other pseudo-rational explanatory elements, denying scientific and rational thought, can still be put to use, such as the paralogical causality of "miracles," "wonders" of all kinds. The explanation of the origin of things by the divine "Creation." The system then continues its development by materializing and spreading among men, on the outside world.

Finally, the third stage of the process happens and, you will see, how twisted it is! The whole bazaar of solutions to the great agonizing questions, once spread and grafted on to the external, material world, fallen into the public domain, so to speak, is taken over by a form of rational and cold thought (you know, the one used to unclog sinks), materialistic religion suddenly taking on the appearance of a "rational solution to the problem!" It is at this moment that the *Skandha* of the golden cage and the profession of faith appear and that all anguish seems to go away forever. In truth, all the imaginary anxiolytic material is completely "materialized." Its pure immateriality of departure is illusorily considered as materiality, truth and revelation. Materialistic religion is, ultimately, only a derivative of the playful games of human thought, once they have been taken fully seriously.

Subsequently, the system of "materialized thoughts" is the subject of highly intellectual work in theology. It is as if, one day, someone had made a little joke, a hoax, had not dared to reveal the deception and that, subsequently, learned scholars would have started to develop the hoax as a corpus of



completely serious ideas. It is therefore the work of the theologian lords to pursue, support and develop the initial fantasies into a solemn and monumental body of beliefs, dogmas, rituals and moral precepts. All this will be reinforced over time, because the accumulation of generations of eminent theologians, the ancient and sacred feature of the texts, will confer an aura of credibility capable to win the credulity of clients.

Subsequently, it is the number of clients which itself becomes a guarantee of truth. If so many millions believe the same thing, it is not possible that this thing is not true. Not to mention that the crowd leads to emotional phenomena of cognitive receptivity and intellectual obscurantism. It is well known that the more people get together, the lower the average IQ (assembly laughter). But, beyond this joke (is it really one?), the collectivization of materialist religion leads to its institutionalization and a set of practices and rituals that combine to emotionally support the beliefs, which are now part of the culture of a given society. There are retroactive loops: beliefs justify rituals and rituals reinforce beliefs, which ultimately results in a vast collective of clients alienated from the dead materialist religion, incapable of any questioning, incapable of accessing their interiority, to the dynamic current of living religion.

However, human beings are what they are and, here and there, minds appear that are freer than others, capable of questioning dogmas and practices. Because living religion is always there, in everyone, and can be awakened at any time.

What is the process of quitting dead religion and entering living religion? Should we consider pure abandonment? A form of letting go? A renunciation? A denial? This is both an unintelligent and dangerous proposition. For when an Ego abandons something, renounces something, its natural tendency is to enter into a reactive combat at the same time. The abandonment is so painful and the nostalgic appeal of old mental patterns is so intense, that the Ego does not take

long to embody its inner struggle on the outer world. It is the projection of the internal struggle onto the outside world.

You know all those puritans who struggle with their own sexual inclinations and end up stalking the sex around them, in their neighborhood, turning themselves into relentless censors of other people's sexuality. The religious Ego would certainly not escape this mechanism of exteriorization and, projecting its internal combat onto the world, it would begin to fight its intimate religion by attacking that of others, arms in hand.

Therefore, pure and simple, brutal abandonment, a kind of "deconversion," is strongly discouraged. This would ultimately reflect the opposite of what we want to produce. In a way, the purpose of living religion is related to the abandonment of the Ego to itself. Its stripping, its wear and tear, its dissolution. Letting go is above all internal. Also, "leaving one's dead religion" like that, on a whim, without any inner work, is highly suspect. It's still, obviously, a smart trick of the Ego, a subterfuge to be able to stay alive.

If you want to enter into living religion, prepare to give up something of yourself, and for that you will have to be smarter than yourself, more cunning than your Ego.

### ***Dismantle the golden cage***

You don't leave the golden cage so easily. One does not part with centuries of beliefs with a simple spiritual wave of the hand. All that we are likely to gain is to find ourselves in a new cage, but less golden than the previous one, even a very rusty and opaque cage. The trip may, in fact, be long. It can even last a lifetime, or even several! We don't get out of the cage. You can only remove the bars one by one. And the dismantling itself is long and tedious, because for dismantling you need to carefully study each bar, assess its consistency, strength, structure. Then you have to find out how it is assembled to the other bars and how it all connects

between the ceiling and the floor of the cage. I hope you follow me on the thread of metaphor.

In the meantime, during all this interior process, you would be well advised above all not to leave the temple, to abandon your prayers, to deny your lords, and your chamberlains, and your cooks, because otherwise you will run the risk of finding yourself too quickly religiously homeless. Do everything that your dead religion recommends to you, but start doing it in conscience, by questioning yourself, by reflecting on what you are doing, on what it produces in you and around you, on its effectiveness, on the disadvantages, because there are always downsides to something.

The golden cage, the one you will see gradually disappearing, like a morning mist under the warm rays of the sun, this beautiful golden cage is made up of concepts and theories. Concepts and theories on which you will begin to work, before any other form of abandonment. To defeat your enemy, you have to know him well. This enemy is interior, it is in you, it is your Ego, this superficial and simian layer of your being. Also, it is yourselves that you must know. Not to fight, but to know. It always comes back to that, to the Greek “know thyself”<sup>21</sup>.

The first work therefore bears on the mechanism of exteriorization, which is fundamental and which ultimately crosses the entire structure of the religious Ego. It is for this reason that exteriorization is the hardest stripping work that we have to do. Exteriorization breaks down into two sub-mechanisms: ignorance of interiority and projection. You have to work on these two aspects.

You won't immediately reject the lords and their messages, but you don't have to settle for that. You must go beyond the official line of dead religion and do the work of

---

<sup>21</sup> In reference to the *Gnôthi seautón*, a precept engraved on the temple of Delphi.

pioneering, of rediscovery. Be interested in Book and Books. Confronting the Books is always instructive. Read them all! If you can afford it. Take an interest in chamberlains, saints, mystics, their lives and sort between what you perceive to be human in chamberlains and what is legendary. Finally, take an interest in the cooks, the prophets, the precursors, the first messengers. Again, sort out the legend, the dressing of wonder added by centuries of well-meaning writers. Ditch the unnecessary tinsel and focus on the sidelines of the cooks' behaviors and little words.

Drop the "miracles," the "proofs" of God. They are only spiritual rubbish for simple minds. Living religion does not need "proofs," magic, psychosomatic cures, nor unlimited miraculous fast food. Rather pay attention to what such a cook did during his childhood. How did he experience his withdrawal from the world? What were his first words on returning from the desert? What are the small symbolic gestures he has made? Be interested in metaphors, parables and make a clean sweep of the interpretations of lords, past and present. Forge your own interpretations, with your intuition, with your heart, with your intelligence. And, by doing all this, you will begin to nourish your interiority, to provide it with good soil for later, when the living plant of your new religion will begin to grow.

Of course, you will have to radically change the way you pray. Interiority cannot develop without the practice of living prayer and the abandonment of all this exteriority of dead prayer. You will have to learn recollection, calm, absence, silence, condensation of the mind. You will stop begging, whining, complaining. Stop tormenting yourself about your "faults," your "sins." No one has the power to forgive you except yourself. Your inner movement must always be to go forward, in an innocent discovery of your little inner world. For in this inner world, there are no longer either guilty or innocent, these notions themselves

disappear. Also, moral torments, turn away! Stop brooding and condense your mind on the technique of interiority.

And so is the victim. Egos build all their “egoity” around a trauma, a victimization, which permanently inhabits them and gives meaning to their lives. I’m not claiming post-traumatic stress disorder doesn’t exist. It exists, but there are ways to maintain it and other ways to distance yourself from it. Victims and culprits are the opposite of each other. They both identify with past events, past lived experiences. However, the journey into interiority also requires abandoning the past, because its weight nourishes the present and the future with suffering and confusion.

The true notion of *Karma* is not so much this vision of the causes and effects of our acts (or those of others on ourselves), as the value, quite current, that we are willing to grant to acts, of oneself or of others. *Karma* is a construct of the mind, more than any external practical causality. Breaking the karmic chain is already redirecting one’s interiority towards other mental patterns. If we want to live in a healthy and clean environment, we clean our house inside, not in the garden, nor in the big universe.

The lords are not to be rejected or despised. Most are sincere. One day, they fell in love with all this exteriority of dead religion, we’re not going to blame them, it’s human. On the other hand, the first of the abandonments consists in no longer considering the lords as humans above the others, representatives of the Divinity on Earth. They are just the symbols, the sandwich men of God: in front it is “Believe in me” and behind “Please give generously!”

But, beyond this first abandonment, rather than an interior distancing vis-à-vis the lords, it is rather to an enrichment that you must devote yourself. Try to compensate for the spiritual poverty of the teachings of the dead religion by seeking other teachings, more turned towards interiority and that simplicity which guarantees

against any excessive externalization. Learn living prayer <sup>22</sup>, meditation, on the breath, on the sound, on the image or other small unimportant stimulus. Practice daily, gradually following the path of your inner garden, day by day.

The second abandonment of the golden cage is that of symbols. Already, you have put these embodied symbols that are the lords at a distance. But slowly start going further. Learn to live without the little wheels on either side of your religion's rear wheel. After all, you're a big person, aren't you? What remains of grigri, lucky charm, magic amulet, in the fact of carrying a religious symbol? More than you think. The proof is the difficulty in getting rid of it. However, the display of the symbol, therefore of his religion, therefore of his personality, is a powerful mechanism of exteriorization which feeds his Ego well. To deprive it of it, to ration it of it and to teach it to do without it is an important stage on the way to an entry into living religion. In living religion, God does not need your jewels, nor your wardrobe, nor your hair, nor your beard. What It wants, above all, is authenticity, from you. It wants you in soul, not in body or in trinkets.

Likewise, start freeing God from all the special effects that hide It from you or disguise It from you. The great monotheisms have all fought against idolatry, however, this idolatry continues insidiously by externalizing the Divinity on the material world. The Divinity is neither an architectural structure, nor a Book, nor a human being, whatever it is, nor any practice. Divinity is not even a concept, a representation. Do not forget that the return to the living religion, therefore the abandonment of the dead religion, consists, inside yourself, in descending into the heart of the structure of the *Skandhas*, to go below *Vijñāna*, in below concepts, theories, beliefs. Also, to conceive of a Divinity as an "embodied" personality in the universe and as

---

<sup>22</sup> See the next chapter on living prayer.

entangled in our little earthly affairs is the worst conception that one can have of the Divinity.

God is an inner movement of the soul, of your mind, towards something unspeakable; the unspeakable and the inconceivable of *Vidyā*, this openness in the absence of Ego. And, in this sense, the notion of “God,” of the “Divine,” is only a symbol of this unspeakable and inconceivable, nothing more. And when you mingle this movement of the mind with all your earthly affairs, you mislead this symbol of the unspeakable and inconceivable experience of encounter with the Divine. It is polluted.

In the golden cage, we find the cooks, the chamberlains and the lords... And the clients! The clients are you and me. The others have established a kind of hierarchy between the clients and themselves. The clients are the herd of bleating sheep and the others, the cooks-chamberlains-lords are the pastors, the guardians of the herd, the elite too. And we know that there is in this symbolic hierarchy a relationship of power over the minds, over the Egos. There are Egos who are more Egos than others! This is a “reality” in the sense of a mental construct instilled from your childhood.

Going in the direction of living religion does not consist in rejecting the system, but in thinking about it and gently questioning it. From a very young age you have been brainwashed. It's called culture, values, principles, dead... religion. Also, you need some kind of deprogramming or psychotherapy to leave this dead religion. The problem being that around you the masters in deprogramming are rare and that they could even be suspicious. Think of all those master charlatans, from India and elsewhere, landing in the United States to teach you the “Way of Spirituality” for dollars. I'm afraid that, ultimately, the only master you can trust is yourself. Therefore, the deprogramming, it will certainly be up to you to undertake it, alone.

The first step is to change reality, by reconnecting with reality. And for that, you will dissolve the reality of this

hierarchy which places you in the rank of sheep in the herd by considering the common denominator between you and the troika. Take, consider what goes through your head: the sheep and the troika are similarly decked out in a body, they are equally mortal, they can equally catch cold, they are equally limited in knowledge and intelligence, they piss and shit similarly!

Desacralizing the troika is essential in order to be able to engage in the deconstruction of the golden cage, of dead religion. You are a client, but they are also clients. Cooks-chamberlains-lords are just clients who pretend to be privileged, special cases, VIPs. Some claim to have “received a message from the boss,” others claim “to have made the trip,” still others claim that a throne, a golden garment and a cupola deify them. But these are only pretensions, pure rhetoric, sales pitch. The troika and the clients are the same thing. They are with you in the same reality-show in TV, at a time actors, directors and producers. They pull the strings, you are the puppets, the figurants. You will have to dismantle this last bar of the golden cage and you will realize how much the temple, the Book, the Divinity and the people themselves are obstacles on the direct path towards the Divine which is within you.

### ***Deconstruct secondary actions***

The first of the secondary actions to be deconstructed is therefore that of the temple, the ***Skandha of the temple***. This is to relativize the importance of cooks, chamberlains and lords in your spiritual life. The question to ask yourself is this: to what extent is the temple an obstacle or at least a distraction on the path of egoic self-emptying?

The question can also be asked in reverse: to what extent does the temple nourish my Ego, thus hindering the process of deconstruction of the Ego?

For we must be clear: when we say deconstruction of dead religion, we mean deconstruction of the Ego. Dead religion is



an invention of the Ego, a fantasy of the Ego. And this fantasy is a kind of fog, more or less thick, this religious materialism which prevents you from advancing in your interiority.

The temple of the troika is obviously no longer in pure divine inspiration. The lords rehash the past, offer you an accompanied trip, in a group, in a gleaming and air-conditioned bus, while the real trip is done hitchhiking, with your backpack and going to eat and sleep with the locals. So don't be surprised to find the spiritual journey of dead religion insipid, so unexciting, even counterfeit.

The authentic experience of the cooks, of the first humans, is no longer present at all in the temple; it's just a four-color leaflet to boast about the dream beaches and luxury hotels with swimming pools and saunas of spirituality. Also, take the leap! Step back from the temple and explore your own inner temple and you will be on the path to true liberation.

Committed as you are, on the inner path of living religion, you are now going to accomplish an epistemological leap, a real internal deconstruction, but you cannot escape it, it is the *sine qua non* condition of an access to living religion, your new "baptism." This does not bind you, it unbinds you. The profession of faith is obviously too much on this path.

We have said it: faith is a rootless tree, which floats one meter above the ground. Now, the purpose of living religion is rootedness. It is therefore no longer a matter of "believing," but of acquiring an inner uncertainty. However, unlike faith, which is only an intellectual artifice, a toggle switch that has turned reason OFF and emotions ON, inner uncertainty cannot obey this ON/OFF logic. It is a gradual and long internal discovery, based on stripping down the illusions that hide us from ourselves. This is why a distancing from any profession of faith is the first step, the most important of the steps. This is the first of the freedoms that you will thus gain: renouncing faith, you enter fully into doubt, scruples, *Religio*.

Of course, this renunciation is terrible. And if you think so, it's good that here we have the key to the whole process. The

paradigm shift is moving from the false “certainty” that faith gives you, to the fundamental uncertainty of living religion. You are no longer a little child who believes in Santa Claus; you pass to the status of “big” who assumes the poverty of his family: no Christmas this year again!

After this fundamental renunciation, which will commit you to the inner path, you can begin to distance yourself from the temple and its spectacular activities. The Divine is within you. He is not in the pageantry of the lords. It is not in ceremonies or collective rituals. He’s not in the crowd. But it is inside you, at the heart of this interiority. Also, it is this interiority that you must cultivate, each day, with the help of living prayer.

It is amazing to see to what extent, for certain religious Egos, the Book has become a fetish object, an informational incarnation of the Divinity, a sort of spiritual almanac, instruction manual and GPS for their life. The ***Skandha of the Book*** reflects both the materialistic character of the religious Ego, but also its inclinations to dependence, to submission without reflection, to the illusion of the “master’s word.”

It’s the same illusion that makes people take something seriously, consider it real, just because it’s written in a newspaper, a book, because someone talked about it on television, because they saw it somewhere on the internet. “Seen on TV,” “Google told me so” and, immediately, it becomes true, it becomes serious. It is a naive credulity, which sets aside the freedom to think, the critical sense, the intelligence, as well as the personal creativity, in favor of a stupid adhesion to the thought of the other, of a sheep mentality, of a passive submission to the conceptions of others. A naive credulity that we find as well in the relationship of the religious Ego to its Book.

I would never say reject the Book. I am simply saying that this Book, written many centuries after the founding events that, this Book, which has undergone so many influences, positive and negative that, this Book, which freezes past,

outdated, often archaic thought that, this Book should neither be taken at face value, nor be immediately accepted, without a minimum of analysis. In fact, a living religion should make it its essential mission to rewrite its Book from top to bottom every century, even every generation. There should be a Bible or a Koran or a Torah 1.0. Then 1.1, then 1.2, then 2.0, then 3.0 and 4.0 and 5.0 and so on. A “holy” Book is a spirituality software, which must constantly evolve, be updated, change from version to version.

The most certain symptom of a dead religion is this fixity of its writings. The vein of the original cook was totally lost, the chamberlains added esoteric writings that are difficult to understand today and the lords imposed their rules of the game so that things would remain forever unchanged. That’s right “dead” and fixed religion.

Ah! Admittedly, the Book has a beautiful appearance: illuminated cover or artistically turned scrolls, ultra-thin and resistant paper, beautiful printing, sometimes a few colorful illustrations to brighten up, everything to make it the fetish object that it has become. Here again, a form of idolatry, which does not say its name, has developed and prevails. Both for the physical object and for the designs and theories it contains. An idolatry of information.

The Book is the bearer of idolatry, but also of “unique thought,” of a grip on the intelligence and creativity of men. In this sense the Book is eminently unhealthy, because not only does it impoverish those who read it without reflection, but in addition it splits reality, it is both the seed and the soil of all religious violence. The Book becomes an instrument for exercising power, for maintaining privileges, for slyly hateful propaganda, because even if the Book sends you a message of love, there are lines between the lines, there are ambiguities and underpinned, exegeses and interpretations and all of this carries exclusion, rejection of the different other, hatred and violence at least potential, if not explicit. The Book is propaganda of doom disguised as hope.

Also, the traveler of living religion must beware of the Book, of the Books. Do not reject them, but study them, bring them a critical, analytical mind and distance yourself from them. The real "Book" is written within yourself. Living prayer, each day, will allow you, slowly, to discover its pages and verses. Turn towards your interiority, seek your interior Book, it is the only one which will not deceive you.

And then there is this fantastic invention of Divinity. The ***Skandha of Divinity*** probably goes back a long way. We know it is a projection. A hallucinated act of imagination about the world. And when we see what state the world is in, we can wonder if the Divinity has not definitively abandoned us. Or if it never existed. In fact, the Divine is only a mirage, a psychic charm, the teddy bear that we keep in our head to sleep well on the soft pillow of soft beliefs.

The invention of the Divine reflects an animist thought and monotheism has only unified and universalized this primordial animism and, today, in the era of reason, intelligence, science, the persistence of Divine reflects an obvious lack of courage. God is the inner amulet of the weak-minded and fearful. They do not have the courage to face the scruple and the doubt of living religion, so they become anesthetized by this grandiose representation of a universal Divinity.

These anguished little children take refuge and submit to an idea, a concept of omnipotence, infinite love, absolute power, in order to give themselves a little relief. They don't realize that by doing this they totally surrender, they ignore the resources that are within themselves, they ignore the Divinity that dwells within them. All in their exteriority, like a God among the stars, they neglect the inner way, the discipline of the mind, the asceticism of concepts. God hangs like an amulet around their necks, they wind it up every Sunday, like a clock, and in the meantime, they use Its name to swear.

So the traveler of the living path should forsake this junk God and turn to the Divinity within himself. Divinity is not the result of an imagination. It is the indescribable recollection at the heart of the practice of living prayer. It is this little intimate rendezvous in itself. It is an inner smile that takes shape little by little. It is that stillness and peace at the center of the mind. Divinity has no place in the world, it is not the one which triggers earthquakes or which prevents them. The Divinity is infinitely powerless outside, but omnipotent within, in the sense that It reveals Itself in you as a creative force, a limitless compassion, a reason beyond concepts and theories. It is lived, not thought and rehashed.

I'm sorry to be a bit lyrical about the inner Divinity, but, you see, that's the sign that this is a very personal experience. A powerful and authentic experience. We are very, very far from the "Rock 'n' Roll" God adored in the temples, under the capitals or on the squares. The "God of the people" is an imagined idol. The living God only speaks to lonely people.

For the complete abandonment of the *Skandha* of secondary actions will necessitate the abandonment of the ***Skandha of the people***, of this factitious identity of the religious Ego, of this will to be a special being, apart, belonging to a group, to a community. It is in no way a question of abandoning one's community and culture, but rather of putting oneself aside from the religious part of the culture. Religion must be intimate, secret, personal. You need to get out of the great religious circus, with its big top, its jugglers, its clowns, its wild animal tamers, its magicians and conjurers.

The people are, by nature, presumptuous, they take themselves for something special, important and they give themselves qualities that they are far from having. The people imagine themselves to have a particular alliance with the Divine. This would give him rights, in particular that of despising and dominating other peoples. It is enough to see how religions were so easily involved in colonization. The

religions of the people are in the same vein as commercial exploitation, political abuse, cultural domination and good-natured racisms. You are colonized to bring you “civilization” and religion is never far away. It is part of the pack. The pastors cover your wives’ breasts and drag you to the temple where you will have to ape the practices of the “God’s people.” The people feel superior and want their hegemony over the whole Earth.

To abandon the people is to leave the world of the Wild West, with the good guys on one side and the bad guys on the other. On one side the “believers,” on the other the “unbelievers” or the “infidels.” The people therefore embody and often enact the fundamental antagonism of all dead religions. The people can easily go so far as to become assassins, warmongers, and enter the hell of atrocities.

Also, on the path of living religion, you would be well advised to abandon the “people.” On this planet, there are no “peoples,” there is only a humanity which is tearing itself apart, which is fracturing, which is fighting itself and which is running to its loss. To abandon the people is to stop taking seriously these artificial identities, the community culture, of “as for oneself,” of “what will people say” and of exclusion. Use your imagination to soar, far away, among the stars, and look closely at our tiny little world. You will no longer see any “people” there, but teeming vermin. Then will you understand, perhaps, that you can be something other than all these vermin.

Until now, the movement back to living religion, which I described to you, concerned only your inscription as Ego in the world, the society. One can sum up my words by saying that a little detachment, of abandonment, cannot harm the religious Ego. In any case, the following stages of the inner journey will be greatly facilitated if you have already placed yourself somewhat apart from the world, from the “people,” if you have begun a *tabula rasa* with regard to the Book and the religious troika cooks-chamberlains-lords. Now we are

going to move on to something more difficult, since it is a question of deconstructing mental behaviors. Besides, storing your kippah and crucifix at the bottom of a drawer is child's play. You will attack the pig, the rooster and the snake which are in you!

### ***Deconstruct initial reactions***

I will tell you about the deconstruction of the three animals, the ***Skandha of the initial reactions***, separately, but we must not forget that they are interconnected and that the rooster and the serpent come out of the mouth of the pig. Also, from a practical point of view, you must see the three deconstructions as simultaneous and linked to each other.

Let's start with the snake. In the ***Skandha of the Snake***, the religious Ego is marked by movements of aversion, rejection and aggression. These movements serve a mechanism of projection which consists in rejecting around oneself the defects which one has in oneself. This approach results from the fact that the religious Ego considers itself both on the side of the "good" and that it would be "good," perfect, without faults. The proof, all it takes is a small confession to regain all of its virginity.

Deconstruction, at this level, will therefore consist in recognizing that one is neither good nor on the side of the "good guys," because this side does not exist, there are no "good guys," there is only imperfection! From there, accepting yourself for what you are: neither good nor bad... Hold on! Apply a Nagarjunian tetralemma to yourself:

**"Good – Bad – Good and Bad – Neither Good nor Bad."**

And meditate deeply on it. The surest way to distance yourself from the Ego, especially from its religious version, is not to attribute any qualities whatsoever to it. The very meaning of any confession thus disappears. And, moreover, you will avoid this petty tendency to attribute to others, by

projection, your own faults. Which, as a result, will prevent you from having hostile feelings and attitudes towards others (especially those of another religion). You eat your humble pie and, with the humility and modesty that should not take long to emerge in you, you can really begin to understand the meaning of the word compassion: an openness to others that is neither love, neither hate nor indifference.

You have just withdrawn a good part of your qualities and faults, but there remains, deep down, still a big something, an elementary form of identity. It is the ***Skandha of the Rooster***. This identity is marked by the will, the desire, the motivation, the passion. It's a driving identity, like when a young man identifies with his big convertible sports car and the big engine running under the hood. The rooster is all of these things at the same time: the engine, the car and the guy in it who parades around town on Saturday nights whistling at the girls. We can quite well use this as a metaphor for the religious Ego: displaying the conspicuous signs of one's religion, of one's faith, displaying this passive proselytism armed with crests, beaks and feathers, even crowings.

To deconstruct the rooster is to renounce all these artifices, these disguises of dead religion. You are not a beard, turban, veil, yarmulke, cross, saffron robe, or anything else. You are not a speech, an affirmation, a claim. Nor are you a ritual, a sacrament, a tradition, a prohibition. You don't even speak of "religious freedom," because this freedom is illusory. When it comes to freedom, dead religion locks you up, puts you in the chicken coop, behind a fence, with the other hens and convinces you to cackle in chorus: "Freedom! Freedom ! Freedom!" And you convince yourself of that.

Leave out all that pageantry and deceptive sales pitches. At the base, you are nothing and no religious accessory, whether it is clothing or behavior will change anything. Accept this first openness to self-emptiness, to the rejection of any self-definition. But beware! Don't make that rejection an Ego



attribute or attitude either. It is a rejection without rejection, a silent rejection. An inner letting go. Nothing apparent on the outside.

We finally come to the pig, the ***Skandha of the pig*** <sup>23</sup>. The pig, as we know, discriminates at low levels. Simplistic classification, fast, effective, one must move forward! Giving up the pig is undoubtedly the most difficult, because it is the basis of the initial reactions: it is the condition and the starting point. The pig relies on its impressions and reacts accordingly. It doesn't think much, if at all. It works on instinct or intuition. Indifference, attraction or repulsion are the three paths that a pig can follow. It's limited, but for our pig it's relatively effective. This is how, as a religious Ego, it will build its dogmas, its precepts and its beliefs, from which all the rest of the barnyard will flow, from the rooster to the snake.

Also, deconstructing the pig will consist of questioning, then gradually taking some inner distance with this tendency to want at all costs that reality be divided into classes, oppositions, dichotomies, simplistic Manichaeism. Because these classes are what found the religious theories which are, in the end, only conceptual taxonomies, intended to absorb anxiety, by giving crosshairs to a partial and biased vision of the real world. Drop the theories, whatever they are.

Accept things as they are and give more importance to the interiority than to the exteriority, such is the way of the "de-pig-mentation" (assembly laughter).

You will have noticed that the way in which we present the deconstruction of the religious Ego starts from the exteriorization towards the interiorization, from the social

---

<sup>23</sup> As a reminder, it is not a question here of the "pig" as a taboo animal of certain great dead religions and whose term can be used as an insult. It is the iconographic and psychological symbol of Tibetan Buddhism, signifying ignorance, the loss of primordial openness of the mind.

behaviors, towards the mental attitudes. Of course, as I have clearly specified, this deconstruction, in reality, takes place simultaneously at all levels, these being linked to each other. It is its explanation that requires sequencing. So now, with the **Skandha of the initial conditions**, we come to the heart of the interiority of the egoic functioning and we come closer to living prayer.

Religious materialism is an almost automatic reaction to the two components of this *Skandha*: *Duḥkha*, the basic anguish, and *Kāma*, the desire which arises from this anguish and whose satisfactions seek to control it. We have seen that religion offers multiple outlets for desire and itself arouses desires (for example, divine contact, divine protection, fulfillment of wishes through divine intercession, paradises which nourish the hope of blissful survival, contrition and forgiveness and so on).

### ***Deconstruct initial conditions***

All that we have just described concerning the deconstruction of the religious Ego, the distancing of religious materialism, will contribute to awakening the dragon which is in you, *Duḥkha*, the fundamental anguish, the **Skandha of the dragon**. In fact, this dragon is not unique, it is composite, it presents itself under several aspects, various colorations. We can identify at least five of them. First of all, and it is undoubtedly the most imposing of the dragons of this *Skandha*, the black dragon, that of the anguish of death: the anguish of dying, of disappearing, of no longer seeing the blue sky and not knowing if there will be “something after” or simply nothing. The total annihilation of the self and this annihilation, this concept of the disappearance of the self is, in itself, an unbearable abomination. This is why the color black is chosen for this dragon, because black, in truth, is not a color, but an absence of color. Such is the first dragon: the anguish of a possible disappearance, absence of the Ego.

Secondly, another anxiety, linked to another form of “absence,” appears. It is the yellow dragon of the anxiety of no longer existing, what psychologists call narcissistic anxiety. Of course, we are not dead. Physically we are alive. But it is the feeling of existence that is in danger here. The yellow color here symbolizes the sun and its possible eclipse. Suddenly, the sun can disappear, in broad daylight! We know it still exists, but its light has gone out and it’s scary, painful and ultimately unbearable. It is the anguish of being nothing to anyone, of counting for nothing, of being useless. The yellow dragon can lead to depression and suicide, because the Ego that has lost its sense of being has lost itself. The result is both great suffering that must be ended and a deep sense of the futility of life. Also, the yellow dragon, sometimes, succeeds in defeating the black dragon, the fear of death.

The third dragon, the blue dragon, corresponds to the fear of abandonment and loneliness. It’s a very infantile anguish, the anguish of the very small child who is afraid of getting too far from his mother, who is afraid of finding himself alone, who is afraid of the dark. It is because of this dragon that an extraterrestrial observing the human species from space, with high resolution satellite images of the great terrestrial cities, exactly like those of Google Maps, would see that a considerable number of these beings go in pairs, at least two. Our extraterrestrial would undoubtedly deduce from it a reproductive system, but also a kind of reciprocal dependence, because seeing all the human industry he would know that reproduction is not everything in these beings. The blue symbolizes here the immense sky in which one feels very alone, the ocean, with in the middle a desert island, without anyone, only the Ego. The fear of loneliness is deeply rooted deep within us and is never far from the feeling of nonexistence and the fear of dying.

The next dragon is red, red like heart, red like blood. It is the dragon of lack of love. We can be alive, exist through a mission, a job that gives us importance and meaning in life,

we can even feel surrounded, but... there is one last lack, the lack of love. The red dragon is a very mysterious dragon, because love itself is very mysterious. What exactly does “I love you” mean? Have you seriously asked yourself this question? Try! You may have some surprises.

The anxiety of the lack of love is, ultimately, very close to the anxiety of abandonment, often they mix, merge. Red and blue combine to make purple, a sort of hybrid dragon, which in the West would be associated with mourning and funerals. We live as a couple, so we're not alone, we're not “abandoned,” but something is missing. It lacks this little pepper, this hint of salt, which enhances the taste of the couple. It lacks love. You can be in the middle of a crowd, and yet feel alone, because without love. Love is an illusion, but a necessary illusion, a mysterious intimate conviction, only built on fog and wind. But it works ! It is only necessary to see the torments of the teenager faced with his first love affair and also, faced with his first breakup! Red is love, but it is also the color of its opposite, of hatred, anger, spite, the feeling of rejection.

Finally, the fifth dragon is the white dragon of fear of inner emptiness. As much as death is the blackness of disappearance, the nothingness of colors, as much is the fear of the inner Voidness the asymptote of everything, of all the mixed colors, yellow, blue, red, and even black, to form this inner collapse of the Voidness. Go into yourself and find nothing there. Also, usually we are agitated in our head. We think. We imagine. We fantasize. We daydream. We talk to ourselves. We have all kinds of picturesque fascinations and entertaining speeches in mind, in order to escape this anxiety of the Voidness.

And many even do not even have this imaginative resource and feel obliged to read a magazine, watch television, play on their smartphone, light a cigarette, consume a psychotropic, to be able to escape this inner emptiness.

Like all Egos, the religious Ego is confronted, at the start, with all these dragons and it must find a solution. And that's where the "sixteen-year-old virgin" comes in, the ***Skandha of the sixteen-year-old virgin***. And, just as there are several dragons symbolizing *Duḥkha*, we will find in response several virgins, of different colors, to symbolize the different "solutions" to *Duḥkha*, the fight against suffering.

In Buddhist symbolism you must have heard of the "Armies of Māra," you know these demons who attacked the Awakened during his meditation to try to make him recover his Ego. It is said that these demons first appeared in the form of beautiful sexy girls, who danced and sang, a bit like Madonna, like virgins (assembly laughter)<sup>24</sup>.

The virgins dance and sing and their dances are exalted in the eyes of the religious Ego and their songs are sweet in the ears of the religious Ego. Each virgin has its particular "color," corresponding to the dragon it is trying to subjugate: the black virgin, the yellow, the blue, the red and the white.

The black virgin dances to the rhythms of the drum, the drums of the funeral marches and she sings sweet promises: an "eternal soul for the Ego," an "eternal paradise for the Ego" or an "endless hell if the Ego was not wise!" The black virgin promotes this certainty, this interior conviction that this Ego, which is ours, cannot stop there. That life is endless, even if it must continue on "another plane."

With the black virgin, it is no longer just an intellectual religious dogma, telling a beautiful story to die for. It is a basic reassurance, which has its roots well below the intellect. It is a form of intimate arrogance, of the religious Ego, but of all Ego finally, the arrogance of the obligatory survival: "no, it is not possible, admissible, conceivable, imaginable, that I do not survive, one way or another."

---

<sup>24</sup> Scarlet Lama refers here, in a mischievous wink, both to the erotic shows of the singer Madonna and to her flagship title: "*Like a Virgin*."

"Maybe I'll just reincarnate!" What characterizes sixteen-year-old virgins is that basically they don't need religion, but they're still at the root of all religions that tell nice stories to people. The virgins have their own power of seduction, they represent a prewired dead religion, in a way, instinctual, the religion of the animal deep inside us, of the animal that "wants" to be and never die.

After the black virgin, the yellow virgin then enters the scene. It undulates lasciviously, holding a magic mirror in her hands. You know that mirror, in the tale of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," that mirror that tells you that you exist and that you have importance and inner beauty. The yellow virgin represents all these artifices intended to give you importance in the face of the agonizing immensity of the universe. The yellow virgin repeats to you over and over how much you count for the community and for the Divinity, it gives meaning to your miserable existence, it strengthens your failing Ego.

Then appears the blue Virgin, the one who whispers in your ear that you are no longer alone, that you will never again be alone or abandoned. The blue virgin brings with her "deities," "demons," possibly, or even "saints," "prophets," "sons of God," "jinns," "spirits," more or less evil ones, "guardian angels," amulets, charms, propitiatory gestures, religious signs, mystical incantations and so on. In short, it's a whole bunch of gadgets, "psychic plushes," to make sure that you never feel alone again. The blue virgin is the smartphone in my head, with a long list of "contacts." I call who I want, when I want, it always answers!

Then comes the red virgin, very beautiful, seductive, vibrant, hot and exciting. Just think, the virgin of love! Who hasn't dreamed of her? With her torrid and melodious voice, the red virgin sings under your balcony, to tell you explicitly that the Divinity loves you, because you love the Divinity. It's not more complicated. She tells you "I love you," she butters you up, she is quite charming. Reciprocal love guaranteed

and eternal! It is well noted in the marriage contract and the first to walk away loses. Because the red virgin is terribly envious, she is a jealous virgin... Attention, danger! The red then becomes anger and hatred and violence. Because love has its whims, it stamps its feet, puffs, frowns, shakes its head, clenches its fists and jumps on you to strangle you. A lack of love is like a drug addict looking for his next *fix*, he would kill father and mother or he would kill himself.

Finally, to close the pretty spectacle, the white virgin comes out of the wings. She is the one who does the encores, who occupies the field, the stage, when the others have finished. She's a rapper, talkative, with banter and slang words. She raps fast and well, without downtime, without even catching her breath. The white virgin occupies Ego's mind well, to spare it psychic idleness, which leads to boredom and more if affinity. Depression and anxiety lurk, lurking deep in your soul. The white virgin recites the rosary, recites prayers, turns the mills. She puts oil in the mental mechanics, drives the little motor of psychic obsessions and always thinks of controlling the level of the reservoir of religious intentions.

Faced with dragons and virgins, what does the return to a living religion mean? We know it: virgins ride dragons in an attempt to control them. And the virgins call upon the various religious instruments to contain each dragon. Dragons are forever anyway, they can never be slain. It's an eternal fight. The spectacle, in fact, is not only the virgins who dance and sing, it is also all this fantastic ride of virgins doing rodeo, each one on her dragon all fired up. A fascinating spectacle which occupies Ego, which distracts it, sustains it, gives it consistency. Also, the return to living religion passes through this ultimate and intimate inner abandonment of the fight between anxieties and the solutions to anxieties.

*Duḥkha* feeds on itself. By this I mean that the very struggle against *Duḥkha* generates *Duḥkha*, just as *Duḥkha* is

consubstantially integrated into *Kāma*, pleasure. We cannot escape it. Also, the subject of relaxation is the only valid one. Back to living religion requires the learning of inner relaxation, the relaxation of the mind. This is indeed the way of living prayer: the ultimate deconstruction of dragons and virgins. So, dragons and sixteen-year-old virgins go up in smoke...

**Q.** Are there parameters to measure the degree of life, coma or death of a given religion?

**A.** Four elements can be considered: religious theories, religious precepts, religious creativity and spiritual experience. Concerning theories, the more a religion is dead and the more its theories are dogmatic, rigid, imposing, like structures built to last, these theories taking on considerable weight in the religious corpus, as visions of the world, authoritarian and which cannot be questioned. Conversely, in a living religion, theories are secondary and the vision of the world is carried more by religious momentum than by intellectual and rational representation.

Regarding the precepts, the more a religion is dead, the more its precepts become numerous, rigid, finicky and intransigent, generating a cruel and often brutal social superego, a control of minds and a strong charge of guilt. A dead religion is authoritarian, it flirts with totalitarianism and it is essentially negative, in the sense that it is often reduced to a long string of prohibitions, which confines individuals to the status of children always liable to do wrong. Conversely, a living religion has few or no prohibitions. Its precepts are flexible and they do not lead to significant reprobation or specific sanctions. Living religion respects freedom of conscience and all particular cases which are so many exceptions to the precepts. Living religion makes you responsible beings.

On the side of creativity, dead religion is marked by its fundamental absence of creativity. It is a religion which does not renew itself, which does not adapt and which claims to



make societies live as they did five thousand years ago. It is a religion that goes from the divine timeless to the anachronistic, to the point of finding itself completely unsuitable, out of step with the current state of the world, with the progress of societies and technologies. A living religion is, on the contrary, fundamentally creative. This is what makes its vitality. It adapts flexibly to changes in society, to the times and to the development of science and technology. A living religion is thus able to integrate all these changes and novelties into its corpus. For example, a living religion will never blacklist works because they question its dogmas. It will not hurl anathemas against scholars and their discoveries. It will not feel threatened because a new rational and scientific view of the universe is emerging. A living religion can afford this flexibility, because it is sufficiently detached from materiality, which it somehow transcends, so as to be able to accept multiple versions of it. Hence the great adaptability and creativity of living religion.

Finally, the spiritual experience, which is apprehended in a totally different way, depending on whether a religion is dead or alive. In dead religion spiritual experience is frowned upon, as it is likely to detach the minds from their submission to the golden cage and the lords. Also, the spiritual experience is rigorously limited by mechanical and collective rituals, obsessive and totally codified recitative prayers and superficial states of consciousness, all interested in the quest for more or less personal advantages. In a living religion, on the contrary, spiritual experience is itself very much alive and encouraged. It is an experience considered personal, individual, solitary. It is rich in a return to interiority, the place granted to interior silence, the abandonment of mental formations, in particular all those relating to desires. This is an inner descent towards the abandonment of the Ego, while a dead religion encourages the strengthening of the Ego by pushing it to inscribe its spiritual experience in materiality. These are the four

variable conditions which make it possible to distinguish a living religion from a dead religion, as well as a gradation between the two.

**Q.** With regard to “dead religion” and “living religion” and the very different worldviews they convey, can we speak of a “paradigm” in Kuhn’s sense? This reminds me of the two “paradigms” described in praxeology: the “paradigm of expertise” and the “paradigm of uncertainty?”

**A.** It is indeed quite appropriate to speak of a paradigm with regard to the differences between living religion and dead religion. These are clearly “world views,” “humanity views,” “visions of the Divinity” and “prayer views,” which are fundamentally different and cannot be reduced to one other. And I agree with you if you want to see dead religion as the “paradigm of expertise” and living religion as that of “uncertainty.” It is exactly that: on the one hand, we have a knowledge fixed in its certainties and authoritative through this “expertise” of the troika cooks-chamberlains-lords; while, on the other hand, we have a real *Religio*, a scruple, an incessant questioning, which means maintaining the philosophical attitude at a high level of uncertainty and the anguish that accompanies it. In the paradigm of expertise, anxiety is erased, anesthetized by the arrogant certainty and closure of dogmas, while in the paradigm of uncertainty, anxiety is accepted as soil in which may grow the noble plant of the opening.

**Q.** We sometimes hear experts say that religious wars are not really religious wars, but pretexts for economic, political and power struggles. What do you think?

**A.** The affirmation of the simple instrumentalization of religion for reasons of political or economic power can be understood, in a certain way. It is true that religion is very often exploited in the context of struggles that have nothing to do with religion. However, beyond this observation, altogether trivial, we must ask ourselves the question of the ease and consistency with which religion is called upon in

these conflicts. Why is religion so soluble in wars and terrorism?

Two answers can be given to this question. First, as a materialistic religion, religion does not promote detachment from the material world. It instills in individuals a sense of ownership and the defense of the community interest. Materialistic religion takes the world, *Māyā*, human affairs totally seriously and meddles in opinion, morals, politics and economics. It is totally connected to the prevailing materialism: one foot in the sky, of course, but the other is firmly rooted in the earth. This is how dead religions provide a base for all conflicts between humans by cultivating love for the materiality of things.

Then, let us remember that dead religions are based on discrimination, on splitting, antagonisms, hatred and the rejection of the different other. This explains why religions are highly compatible and soluble with all the conflicts that may appear on the planet. Religions have a fundamental vocation to espouse, if not to generate, conflicts between men, they are the underground motors. Conversely, by virtue of its values of detachment from the material and lack of distinction between beings, a living religion can contribute to sparing humanity from conflicts and wars or at least to diminishing them.

**Q.** You said that “God” is the symbol of *Vidyā*, the opening. Does this mean that God does not exist?

**A.** Divinity exists... as a symbol! The fact that it is a symbol does not deprive it of its importance. It is a beacon in the confusion of *Samsāra* and *Māyā*. And, as a beacon and a symbol, God is important. But I’m afraid there’s no such thing as a divine personality, up in the stars, watching us and meddling in our little human affairs, on that speck of dust that we call the Earth. So, let’s leave that junk God to superhero comics and turn to that awesome inner symbol of Divinity.

**Q.** You have described the process of “creating” dead religion in three stages. During the “imaginative” stage, fantasies are created in an attempt to provide answers to the big distressing questions. Is this process individual or collective? And how does it spread afterwards?

**A.** The creation process is usually individual, sometimes within a small collective, but always with a leader who holds the rank of chief creator. It is therefore cooks, the original cook, the one who concocts the first metaphors, the first theories. The process is therefore essentially individual. The initiation of a creative and playful, whimsical thought. Then, it is during the third stage, that other people will take over the fantasies of the cook and consider them as something quite serious, not at all imaginary or fanciful.

Most often, for this to happen, there needs to be a distance in time and especially in space between the cook and the future followers. As it is written: “No one is a prophet in his own country<sup>25</sup>.” At home, the cook passes for a madman (which, sometimes, is not false!). But abroad it is different, because people are led to believe anything if the origin of the thing is unknown, because then it is loaded with mystery and mystery predisposes to credulity. In fact, the cook’s fantasies are taken seriously because the cook himself is seen as an extraordinary being and a good reputation precedes him. He is extraordinary and he has a good reputation, because he is perceived according to people’s imagination, whereas in his village he is just a neighbor with a screw loose.

**Q.** In the first stage of the process of the development of religion, you spoke of the great existential, metaphysical issues which lead to anxiety and imaginative inventions to combat this anxiety. However, what about other more material problems, such as insecurity, disease, protection from enemies, major planetary phenomena such as floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions or cosmic enigmas, such as

---

<sup>25</sup> Paraphrase of the Bible, New Testament, Luke, 4, 24.

the passage of a comet? Such problems also generate anxiety. They seem to be treated the same way, at least in the primitive religions, by imaginary solutions, it is the spirit of the mountain which explains the volcanic eruption, etc. Does this reinforce the "materiality" of religion?

**A.** It is obvious. The same mental mechanisms are at work and, indeed, before a rational science had sufficiently developed, men sought to explain the "mysteries" of the world, of nature, with the help of fantasies of the same ilk than religious fantasies to provide an answer to the anguish of death or the meaning of life. We see how much the great religions feel threatened by the advance of the rational sciences, which is indeed the proof of an identity of process between the two types of problems, metaphysical and material. A materialist religion must be able to explain everything: life, death, the universe, the comet, the volcano, the flood, the epidemic, as well as the strange sub-humans that we have just found on this new continent called America.

**Q.** You just suggested that sometimes the cook could be "crazy." Is this scenario possible to explain the origin of a religion?

**A.** No doubt that could have happened. A mental illness, such as psychosis, leads the individual to confuse his mental contents with reality. If, on the other hand, the individual is intelligent, imaginative and inspired, with charisma, he can very well accomplish on his own the three stages of religious development: he is anxious in the face of such and such metaphysical or worldly questions, he finds imaginary answers which are for him delirious convictions and, lastly, he treats his hallucinated imaginary productions most seriously in the world as real solutions.

Such an individual can quickly convince potential clients around him. His confidence, his charisma, the apparent rationality of his ideas, will contribute to establishing his influence and his power over his fellow men. However, this

idea of the “crazy cook” remains, to my knowledge, totally speculative, because, unfortunately, we have very little objective information concerning the life and mental health of cooks, these elements being moreover subject to process of narrative construction and legends that blur the little rational information we have.

**Q.** Should we engage in any form of fight against religious Egos?

**A.** Certainly not! You would be doing no one a favor, neither yourself nor the religious Egos you would like to fight. To each his own *karma*. The call of living religion is totally individual and cannot be generated by a proselytizing fight, whatever it may be. You must leave the religious Egos to their destiny and not fight them, but on the contrary respect and love them. You see, dead religion is the antechamber of living religion. It is the waiting room, waiting for souls to mature enough to leave the fascination with the religious and turn to the more austere, but how much deeper, spiritual experience of living prayer. In fact, the “fight against” would propel you to the same level of distraction and energy as that of dead religions. There is nothing to fight, not even your inner demons. Neither outside nor inside.

## LIVING PRAYER

Living prayer, we have said, is the privileged path towards your interiority. It participates in the abandonment of exteriorization and of that exteriority proper to dead prayer. An interiority that you must maintain on a daily basis. Inside yourselves is written the Book which speaks of God and it is inside yourselves that this encounter with the Divinity can be accomplished and not outside, in the crowd of clients, in the temple, with chamberlains or lords. Even the cooks are only guides who show the way and not the way itself.

The way, in the general sense, like a track displayed on a GPS and that everyone could take, this way does not exist. The only valid way is yours, it is the path that you will gradually trace alone in your inner garden. This pathway is unique and non-transferable. Also, do not take everything I tell you about “living prayer” for a rigorous method to follow, a manual for interiority. The living prayer that I am going to describe to you must and can only be a guide, an inspiration, a given direction, because the path is indeed you and you alone who will trace it. The path of spirituality is always lonely, two of you are already in the illusion.

Living prayer is not concerned with the *Skandhas* of religious materialism, from the initial conditions to the golden cage. These *Skandhas* condition, rather, a global vision of the world, a general attitude towards the world, which are however a prerequisite and a basic condition for living

prayer. The latter is, on the other hand, concerned with the *Skandhas* who define the structures of the religious Ego, from *Avidyā* to *Manovijñāna*. As for the cycle of the dynamic functioning of the Ego, the six worlds, it is structured by the *Skandhas* of religious materialism. Or, put another way, the *Skandhas* of religious materialism express themselves through the six worlds of *Samśāra*.

If you practice dead prayer, that which is addressed to an imaginary interlocutor, that which wishes, which formulates wishes, which begs, which whines, which rambles, then the purpose of living prayer and its method will radically change things for you. No more daily metro, it's a balloon trip, to new lands, that you will be invited.

Simply condensing one's attention, simply remaining calm, relaxed, simply being silent, outside as well as inside, these are the new learnings of living prayer. Living religion requires solitude, inner silence and the return to one's interiority and not this outward expansion, this turmoil of emotions, all this sentimentality and exaltation of the religious Ego, which are the lot of dead religion.

Living prayer is below the *Skandha* of the initial conditions, below the round of the six worlds. Living prayer is situated in a process of deconstruction of the Ego, of the religious Ego. I spoke to you about "deconstruction" in explaining to you the return to living religion. This deconstruction has little to do with deconstructionists philosophers, such as Heidegger or Derrida<sup>26</sup>. We must see this deconstruction as a destructuring of the Ego. The study of the eight *Skandhas* which structure the religious Ego will therefore be our guide.

Living prayer invites you to follow an interior path, but the end and the goal of this path are the unspeakable and the inconceivable of Being, in the metaphysical sense of the term.

---

<sup>26</sup> Martin Heidegger, German philosopher (1889-1976) and Jacques Derrida, French philosopher (1930-2004).



This is the Divinity of which I am speaking to you and which you will encounter!

In the classic approach to living prayer, meditation, we usually enter directly into the process, we follow the path without markings, as we can and we apply the technique, without asking any more questions. What I am going to suggest to you is rather the behavior of a naturalist, in order to visit your interiority by scrutinizing and analyzing, in a very precise way, each of its components. It's about moving forward gradually by simply being inside yourself and looking a little bit at what's going on there and moving slowly.

It is therefore a question of meditation, when I speak of this living and mute prayer. And, as we are going to follow the pattern of the structures of the Ego, this meditation will be modular. We can, in fact, consider the structures one by one and work on each of them. Each structure will therefore be deconstructed, destructured, through meditative practice.

What I call "living prayer" is therefore a modular deconstructive meditation. A MDM. Because I know that tomorrow you will rush to your friends to explain to them that you have just discovered a new and wonderful method of meditation: the MDM! "Modular Deconstructive Meditation"! And it's going to do it well, with buzzing words and a trendy, easy-to-remember acronym. Because the Egos are incorrigible: they must seize everything and feast on it, it is their mania and the very meaning of their life. But, you will see that, like any real meditation, after the first days of the "honeymoon," the MDM will quickly confront you with the emptiness of this Ego.

Meditation is usually taught to Western audiences following holistic techniques. For example, meditation on the breath or on a mantra. These techniques do not break down according to the structures of the Ego. Thus, the deconstruction of the structures of the Ego is left to the vagaries of the practice of the meditator, to the general

mechanism of wear and tear of the Ego, over time. These global techniques are what are taught to “ordinary” people, which you are. But there are other techniques, less known or more “secret,” that those passionate about spirituality, those who dedicate their lives to the monastery or the hermitage, pass on to each other. These are some of those special techniques, found only in rare tantric texts, that I am going to introduce you to today.

I speak of “modular” meditation, because starting from the most superficial *Skandhas*, up to the deepest *Skandhas*, starting from *Manovijñāna* and descending towards *Vidyā*, it is possible to work on what can be called a “module,” that is to say a meditative technique specific to a given *Skandha*. Each technique is “deconstructive” in the sense that it trains you to deconstruct the corresponding *Skandha*. Each module takes the name of the *Skandha* concerned and we will add the name of a symbolic animal to it, to help you memorize and understand the technique.

The modules must be practiced in the order of presentation, from the most “superficial» *Skandhas* to the most “deep” *Skandhas*. From *Manovijñāna* to *Avidyā*. I will tell you about a technique concerning *Vidyā*, although *Vidyā* is not a *Skandha*, of course. It is simply the general technique on the breath. Because, ultimately, beyond the eight *Skandhas*, we come back to simple things and it will be up to everyone to go even further. Dedicate the time needed to master each module (by practicing every day, it can take a few weeks per module), before moving on to the next one. There is no standard duration, because everyone is different in their abilities to move forward in living prayer.

It should be noted that the techniques that I am going to present to you are advanced techniques. They assume that you are a somewhat advanced student or practitioner in the practice of meditation. By this I mean that you have reached the stage where your body is well stabilized in the posture, which has become comfortable. You know the basics of

meditation, you have started to practice a simple technique, such as meditation on the breath, on a mantra or on the Voidness. It is therefore from this experience that you can begin to practice the MDM techniques.

### Modular Deconstructive Meditation Modules

Module	Technical
<b>Manovijñāna (flamingo)</b>	Evoke a scene, where you are a character and unfold this scene, then break. Then, resume and break the scene earlier and earlier.
<b>Vijñāna (boa)</b>	Evoke a discursive thought of a few words. Then, repeat this thought, each time removing the last word.
<b>Samskāra (gardener)</b>	Talk about three or seven things you like or hate. Then, at each evocation, cut the last thing.
<b>Samjñā (crocodile)</b>	Evoke a lovable or hateful thing and evoke the feeling. Then, at each evocation, see the thing as nothing, without feeling.
<b>Vedanā (fly)</b>	Spot a tiny bodily sensation and let the mind dwell on that sensation until it disappears.
<b>Rūpa (sloth)</b>	Hold a cup of tea in your hands and feel that “you hold.” Then, let go until “it” holds and, further, until no one holds the cup of tea.
<b>Śāśvatanāma (boar)</b>	Evoke a meaningless formula and mentally repeating it over and over.
<b>Avidyā (owl)</b>	Eyes closed. Open your eyes: the universe appears. Close your eyes: the universe disappears.
<b>Vidyā (whale)</b>	Just be aware of the breath: the breath going in and out.

#### *Manovijñāna (the flamingo)*

This module is symbolized by the pink flamingo, because, like the couple of pink flamingos who embark on the ballet of

their nuptial parade, you will work from a scene, the course of an action, in order to deconstruct it. Usually, when practicing meditation, one can be confronted with spontaneous mental contents, like internal speeches, images, scenes, daydreams, etc. The techniques that we present to you already break with this spontaneity and combine two stages: a voluntary evocation and a rupture of this evocation.

In this module you will work on the fantasy scenes that animate, like an interior cinema, your mind. The evocation will consist in imagining a fairly simple scene. You can choose whatever you want. For example, it can be an attractive scene: you follow a corridor in a house, you stop in front of a mysterious door, you enter and there, you see a man or a woman who attracts you lovingly, by his/her beauty, his/her smile, his/her gaze. You go to this character, you lean towards him and you take him in your arms. In another example, this aversive one, when you enter the room, you find a thief ransacking your living room. You rush at him and you give him a big punch to knock him out. That's it for the evocation and the basic scene. At first, you will, like the pink flamingos, repeat this scene over and over in your mind. Let's say three times. Then three more times, but this time you remove a piece from the end. For example, you stop just before hugging the character or just before hitting the thief. It is a rupture, a suspension of thought. Do it in a very conscious way. You have to be particularly attentive to the break, to feel this break, as if there were suspension points in your head. And you start over. Thrice. Then three more times moving forward breaking a new action item that will disappear. For example, you enter the room, but you don't walk towards the character. Breakup. Thrice. Then, you don't enter the room, you stay in front of the door. Then you stop one meter before the door. Then, you stop halfway down the hall. Then you take one step towards the door. Then you stand still. Finally... nothing more. No more stage, emptiness. Do this every day for a few weeks until you have

fully mastered the evocation/breaking mechanism for a mental scene. You can then move on to the next module, that of the boa.

### ***Vijñāna* (the boa)**

At the level of this module, what prevails are the concepts and theories that are mentally conveyed by discursive thought: the inner language. Also, it is on this discursive thought that the work will focus. Discursive thinking reflects both the time frame we are all subject to in this universe and the sequential way our thinking works. Also our language is “articulated,” the phonemes follow each other, one after the other, the words follow each other, the sentences follow each other, all in a long infinite chain, what linguists call the syntagmatic axis. The image of the boa, a long carnivorous snake, is thus quite telling to symbolize the inner language. But you will see that the symbol is even better if you imagine this snake in the process of devouring one of its preys, let’s say a rabbit, you will see this rabbit gradually disappearing into the mouth of the boa, as it swallows it. And that’s what you’re going to do in this module: evoke a short sentence and “swallow” it starting at the end. You remove one word each time.

Let’s take a sentence inspired by the previous module (but any sentence would do): “The flamingo is dancing on the frozen lake.” You begin by evoking this sentence three times mentally, silently, therefore. It is an internal speech. Then, three more times, you evoke this same sentence by removing, at the end, the word “frozen.” It’s the break. But be careful, you must “feel” this break. Just like the previous module, it will be as if suspension points appear in your head (it’s an image, no need to evoke “suspension points”). You evoke: “The flamingo dances on the lake...» and you hold your mind suspended between “frozen” and... nothing. So thrice. Then, a new cycle by producing a break after “the:” “The flamingo dances on the ...”. Thrice. And so on, until you only have

“The...”, then “...”, nothing. Emptiness. A suspension of the mind.

### ***Saṃskāra* (the gardener)**

The “gardener” in question in this module is not at all the human gardener (or, strictly speaking, a Zen gardener, the one who develops a kind of “Japanese garden” for you, capable of carrying you away in *Samadhi*<sup>27</sup> as soon as you enter it). No, it’s the gardener bird, you know, this bird which often doesn’t look like much when it comes to its plumage, but that builds a beautiful arbor out of twigs and decorates it with small brightly colored objects, which it groups together in heaps of the same color, which gives, from a visual point of view, a beautiful aesthetic work, intended to attract local females. This symbol was chosen because it completely corresponds to the technique specific to the *Saṃskāra* module.

This technique consists of mentally evoking (basically, visualizing) three or seven things that you like. But unlike the garden bird, you can also choose three or seven things you hate. It’s up to you to see which is easier for you. Try one, try the other and see what works best for you. We say three or seven, because if it’s difficult for you to go up to seven things, you can settle for only three things (assembly laughter)<sup>28</sup>.

I’m sure that soon someone will ask me: why “three” or “seven...” (assembly laughter)? Really, “three or seven,” “four or eight,” “two or four,” what does it matter! You have to choose something!

Let’s resume. You evoke three pleasant things for you. For example: “a pastry, a child, a kitten.” You do this three times.

---

<sup>27</sup> *Samadhi* is the state of perfect condensation of the mind during meditation, sitting or in action.

<sup>28</sup> Here the participants in this talk started laughing, because Scarlet Lama gave these explanations with such seriousness, then, suddenly, he smiled in this very special way... Passing on the message of the ridiculous nature of all these details accountants.

An evocation means that you see in your mind, “a pastry, a child, a kitten,” condensing in turn on each thing. Do not forget that *Samṣkāra* is the *Skandha* of impulses reactions. Your evocation must be on this register. You must feel this inner, impulsive attraction, this desire, for each thing. Then, you evoke only two things. You make a break on the third. You will suspend your impulse regarding “kitten.” This three more times. Then, you also remove “child,” three times. Then nothing. “Pastry” has also disappeared.

I’ll explain it to you again. It’s not about just thinking three things and ending up thinking only two, then one, then zero things. No, it is a question of evoking the impulse towards three things, then two, then one, then nothing. The “visualization” of the thing is a basic support, but that’s not all. It is about experiencing the impulse (positive or negative) towards those visualized things, then producing the breaking of this impulse towards the things. If you choose the evocation of hateful things, likewise, it is a matter of feeling well the impulse of hatred towards each thing, then of breaking this impulse of hatred. To evoke an impulse of love or hate is much more than “seeing,” visualizing, a thing. This is how the technique of this module should be carried out.

### ***Samjñā* (the crocodile)**

At first glance, one may have the impression that the modules *Samṣkāra* and *Samjñā* are very close and do not perceive their difference too much. Yet, there is one hell of a difference between a garden bird and a crocodile. In the *Samṣkāra* module, we are in a series of impulse-carrying things and we make these things disappear one after another so that we can experience the breaking of impulse, love or hate. While in the *Samjñā* module, we start from the evocation of a single thing, lovable or hateful, it is as you wish, then you will produce a rupture of feeling, passing to indifference, that is to say the lack of feeling. The thing is still there.

The difference between the two techniques is quite subtle, it is true. On the one hand, we have an inner, impulsive attraction for “pastry, child, kitten” and we realize the rupture of this attraction-impulse by erasing “kitten,” then “child” and finally “pastry.” On the other hand, we just have a feeling attached to a thing, for example “pastry.” There is a feeling of love for “pastry” which is visualized or simply evoked. Then, we break this feeling, “pastry” does not disappear as before, but “pastry” passes into the register of indifference.

Here, the image of the crocodile is very telling: the crocodile stands motionless, just on the surface of the water, with just the nostrils and eyes that are flush. We could easily take it for a floating tree trunk so much it keeps a perfect immobility. However, this crocodile is a great predator. It is waiting for its prey. If its prey passes a little distance from it, it contemplates it, still motionless, without batting an eyelid. But if the distance between it and its prey is short enough, then with a roar, with a tremendous impulse, it swallows the unwary prey.

Of course, it is not the final “impulsive” dimension of the crocodile that you need to remember, but rather this long wait, in the most perfect immobility. The crocodile looks at its prey, the one that will end up between its jaws, but it suspends both its impulse and its feeling. It is as if indifferent, as if dead, like a dead tree trunk, faced with an appetizing prey. This is how you have to practice: feeling the amorous attraction for “pastry,” then suddenly, you become a crocodile and feel the most perfect indifference, as if this pastry had become a very ordinary stone.

### ***Vedanā* (the fly)**

With *Vedanā* module we approach the *Skandha* of sensations, the forms-qualities. Those of you who have already practiced meditation know very well how at times one can be assailed by forms-qualities in relation to one’s own body. Aches, twinges, tingling, various itching.



Suddenly, we feel like a small needle pricking our skull, cheek or nose. Beginners come out of meditative stillness for a moment and relieve themselves with their fingertips. I advise beginners to solve, without feeling guilty, this kind of small inconvenience. Really, it's not a problem if you scratch yourself, if you change your posture for a moment, to calm a discomfort that disturbs your meditation.

But the more advanced among you will no doubt have noticed that if you resist for a few moments, sometimes a few seconds are enough, at the call of this unpleasant sensation, it ends up mysteriously disappearing. It is because you have practiced the *Vedanā* module without knowing it. The symbol of the fly, for this module, is so easy to understand that it is not useful to dwell on it. Because precisely, it sometimes happens that it is a fly, which runs on our arm, or our hand, or our nose, which is at the origin of the sensation. And like a fly that runs, that flies away and rests further away, constantly renewing the sensations, managing to detach oneself from it mentally is much more difficult than the simple proprioceptive sting. However, it is this technique of detachment to which you are invited in this module.

First of all you will identify among your residual sensations, one of them. It can therefore be a proprioceptive sensation or that produced by an external element that comes into contact with your skin. A fly, a piece of clothing or a strand of hair stirred by a draft and which touches your skin. Then you're not going to avoid that feeling or get rid of it, but let your mind condense around that feeling. Instead of letting it irritate you (which takes you to the level of *Samjñā*, the feeling, which opens the door to *Samskāra*, the impulse), you will accept it, mentally welcome it, until that it disappears. Note that with a simple itch the effect is quite banal: the sensation disappears. Whereas with a fly, for example, you will live the paradoxical experience of "indifferent sensation:" the sensation of the fly is there, but it

is no longer a sensation. With this technique you will deconstruct the sensation.

### ***Rūpa* (the sloth)**

With *Rūpa* module, we descend even further into the deconstruction of the mechanisms of the Ego to touch on the basic discrimination between Ego and non-Ego. The symbol of the sloth, this arboreal mammal characterized by its slowness and a sluggish metabolism, is an excellent figuration of the mental mechanism at the level of *Rūpa*. The sloth has two or three long claws which it uses to hang in the trees. Two elements must be considered: first, the sloth's hand, with its fingers provided with long claws; and second, these long claws themselves which represent kinds of hooks. What you need to bear in mind is this subtle difference between the hand and the claws. Between what moves intentionally and what is an inert tool, a simple attachment system. The sloth unites in a single thing, two different things: a hand which seizes and which therefore leads a will, and hook-claws which, once fixed, are like inert objects. We could also take the image of the hand of the mountaineer who holds an ice ax to cling to the icy coat of the mountain.

During the practice of this module, you will hold something in your hands. It can be a cup of tea, but you can use any other lightweight object that fits easily in your hands. At first, you feel like you are "holding" the cup. At the beginning you are "hand," "holding hand," with an intention and a will. Then you let go of that experience. You will get used to the sensations of "holding the cup" and... going beyond.

Gradually, from "hand," you will slide towards "claw." By that I mean that little by little "that" holds the cup. There will be a kind of fusion between your hands and the cup and the desire to "hold the cup" will disappear. Something will hold the cup, but it won't be you anymore. And, as you deepen your meditation, you will find that soon no one will be holding the cup. The cup or your hands might just disappear.

With this technique you can thus experience the deconstruction of the fundamental discrimination between the Ego (your intention and your will) and the non-Ego, the cup.

***Śāśvatanāma* (the boar)**

The technique proposed in the *Śāśvatanāma* module is a great classic among meditation techniques, since it involves the mental repetition of meaningless phonemes. As the boar grumbles, you will grumble a little nonsensical formula. It is important that this formula does not make any sense so that nothing else is evoked than the formula itself. What formula? Any formula will do. Find on the internet a text in Latin or Sanskrit, a mantra, for example. Provided you don't know anything about Latin or Sanskrit, of course. Take two or three words at random so that you have four or five phonemes to pronounce. You can also write all the phonemes of your language with the sound "a," (pronounce "a" as in arm) on small pieces of paper. Then you randomly select four or five of these phonemes and hopefully arrange them to form a phonetic chain that has no meaning to you. Otherwise start over!

Once you hold the right formula, you will meditate with it. You surely know the way: repetition aloud, first, to impregnate your mind. Then, purely mental, silent repetition. The deconstruction produced by this technique is that of time. In a way, all meditations, but also everything that occupies us deeply, disturbs our perception of time. We do not see the time passing. We chat with a friend, it's pleasant, fascinating and, suddenly, we realize that it's already seven o'clock and that we're late to go home. We lost track of time. It has been deconstructed.

By mentally repeating the formula over and over again, you will similarly deconstruct time. But unlike chatting with friends or any other time-consuming occupation (like watching a movie), you will experience a pure unfolding of time through this long litany of the formula repeated over

and over. The roar in you will be aware of its growl and this growl will be able to become embedded in the frame of time. Thus, little by little, as this meditation deepens, the formula will fade, become subtler and end up disappearing, bringing with it the disappearance of time itself.

### ***Avidyā* (the owl)**

The owl is a great meditator. He stands motionless on a branch. Open one eye, close one eye. Open both eyes, close both eyes. It does not sleep, it meditates. It is on the lookout for the slightest sound, lower down on the forest floor, that would signal its prey. The owl is attentive and focused. When its eyes are closed, it looks like it is sleeping, but it is not sleeping, it is meditating. It then gives us the impression, when its eyes are closed, that the universe no longer exists for it, that it is completely withdrawn into itself. Then, when it opens its big nocturnal hunter eyes, the universe is reborn for a moment. The owl is attentive.

*Avidyā* module concerns the experience of space, of expanse, when the universe suddenly takes depth, at the disappearance of *Vidyā*, of the opening. Also, the technique, all symbolic, here consists of closing your eyes and forgetting the universe; then, open your eyes and make the universe exist, its depth, its perspectives, its relief. Then, close your eyes, to make it disappear again and so on. It's a very simple technique, just to realize, in the long run, the precariousness of all this illusory consistency of reality. Deconstructing reality and seeing only the real phenomena, such is the goal of this module. It is difficult to explain with words, because we are very close to *Vidyā*, the unspeakable. It is something to experience, to live. You can practice this technique at home, indoors, but it is more effective and pleasant outdoors, facing a large panorama, for example. Open your eyes, close your eyes, open your eyes, close your eyes, slowly, maybe very slowly. That's all.

### ***Vidyā* (the whale)**

For this last module of deconstruction, *Vidyā*, the technique is also very simple, classic, because there is nothing left to deconstruct, except the technique itself. Also, we use the classic support of any meditation: breathing. Just being aware of the breath coming in and going out. The whale metaphor here seems obvious, almost trivial, but you will see that it also hides some subtleties.

We usually breathe automatically without realizing it at all. Only those who have practiced snorkeling know that when you start to run out of air, it's time to come back to the surface, the awareness of breathing, of the need to breathe, suddenly becomes acute. And when we pierce the surface of the water, the great gulp of air that we greedily inhale is entirely charged with consciousness, it is our whole being, our whole life, which passes through this inhaled air, which fills our lungs. Also, it is quite possible that the whale (and other marine mammals) is the only animal that is always really aware of its breathing. It quickly blows out a residue of air to clear the nostrils she has on her head, then quickly sucks in a few thousand liters of air, before diving again.

*Vidyā* module therefore refers to very general meditation techniques. For these techniques, the “evocation” part is very reduced, succinct, subtle. And its deconstruction is also subtle: one enters *Vidyā* without realizing it. And since we are in the whale module, three aquatic metaphors are traditionally presented to explain the method and the process of deep meditation: that of the ocean, that of the mist on the cold glass and that of the river. Let me introduce them to you.

You should picture your mind as a vast ocean, deep and with a choppy surface of waves, swells and storms. Your consciousness is like a frail skiff on the surface of this ocean, lifted, tossed, shaken, sometimes overturned by a storm, sometimes undulating limply on a sea of oil. The meditation technique consists in substituting for this skiff a small

submarine which will allow you to begin to descend under the surface of the ocean. This submarine is, for example, the breath, the technique of the condensation of consciousness on the breath. This allows you to get to the bottom of your mind. Already, at a depth of ten meters, the violence of the waves has disappeared. There is still only the force of the swell and some sea currents to disturb the submarine. But the more your consciousness descends, the more it will encounter calm, stillness, silence, serenity.

Of course, as you descend into the depths of the mind, it is possible to come across some sea monsters, bad memories, past traumas, suffering, but if you don't hang on, these monsters will just pass by. One can also meet some marvels, exotic and extraordinary animals, of great beauty, but they too will only pass, provided you are indifferent to them. Finally, approaching the bottom of the ocean, everything is diluted, everything disappears, including the submarine, which is no longer of any use. The technique disappears, there is nothing left. **Such is the metaphor of the ocean, the metaphor of the technique.**

When boiling water, the steam first comes out invisibly from the spout of the kettle. Because water vapor is an invisible gas. But already, two or three centimeters from the opening of the spout of the kettle, this gas is sufficiently cooled by the ambient air to appear as white smoke, which many people falsely call "steam," whereas it is already no longer steam, but condensed water, as in a cloud.

This cloud of water spreads in the room and meets the cold glass of a window and there, you know it since your childhood, for having made ephemeral drawings with the tip of your finger on a steamy glass, the "steam" condenses into even bigger (albeit tiny) drops of water on that window glass. However, to produce this condensation, to pass from the cloud of water to the droplets of water on the surface of a pane, the water made absolutely no effort, expended no energy. On the contrary, physicists will tell us that it gave up

energy to the glass. This is the right way to practice the technique of meditation: to condense the consciousness on the breath, without any effort, like a vapor which condenses on a cold glass. **Such is the metaphor of the mist on the cold glass, the metaphor of the non-effort.**

We can still represent the mind and its perpetual agitation, like the turbulent, impetuous, sometimes violent flow of a river flowing down a mountain. Admittedly, at times, this river can meet areas of lesser slope, wider areas where it can spread out, a few beaver dams which hold back its course a little, but immediately afterwards, a waterfall, a cascade, rapids, restore its strength and the river is back to jump on the rocks that line its bed.

Consciousness is like an imprudent fisherman who has fallen into this river and who struggles in its waves, its eddies and its whirlpools, at the risk of drowning there. The unfortunate man struggles, tries to cling to the slippery rocks, to a tree trunk passing by, in vain. But now, exhausted, he decides to stop fighting. He then stops making efforts, he rather lets himself be carried by the current and, in doing so, he realizes that he is gradually sliding towards the edge, where the current is less and the waves calmer. Until the moment when our man manages to hoist himself on the bank and to go and sit down at the edge of the river. There he watches the waters flow. The river has neither stopped flowing nor dried up. It's still flowing, but the man is no longer inside struggling, he's just watching it flow, sitting on the edge, quietly. **Such is the metaphor of the river, the metaphor of the right attitude of the meditator or of the inner space.**

**Q.** In explaining the *Vidyā* module to us, you did not mention contact with Divinity. However, isn't the goal of living prayer, in the end, this contact with "God within oneself?"

**A.** It is certain that, presented like this, either the Lama has forgotten something important, or the whole thing is

starting to smell like a scam! (assembly laughter). Please forgive me, I haven't given you God's cell number yet? Do you have something to write down? (assembly laughter).

Throughout these talks, I have endeavored to denounce materialistic, personalistic, projective visions of the Divinity. I also explained to you "that finally," living prayer pursues no goal and "that finally" therefore has no meaning. That when we say "contact with the Divine within oneself," it is a figurative expression, which we must above all not take at face value and imagine "Superman-who-is-in-sky" and descending into your mind. I have also clearly told you that "God" is only a word, a signifier, at the limit a symbol, a metaphor, to refer to an experience of the order of the unspeakable, the inconceivable, the unimaginable and even the unattainable... for an Ego.

Whatever you can imagine, it will not be "God." It will be fiction, myth, materialistic and dead religion, but certainly not "God." "God" is only a beacon in the night of the meditator, just a direction, the path to follow. If I ask you to bring me the "south direction" indicated by the compass in a box, you would be in great trouble.

I didn't talk about "contact with Divinity" in the *Vidyā* module, simply because there is nothing to say about it, because nothing can be said about it. Simply, I give you the conditions under which this "contact" can possibly occur. There is also no guarantee or certainty, because this "contact" will depend on each of us, on our ability to meditate and meditate well, on our *Karma*, on our destiny. I hope, this time, that these hard to understand things of living religion, that these things have been explained more clearly.

**Q.** Concerning the MDM, each module is based on a mental support which is evoked, then little by little deconstructed by ruptures. Is it important to keep the same evocation medium or can it be changed?

**A.** Never forget that the "technique" of meditation is a vehicle that eventually falls apart and is abandoned. Also,



this kind of question, about a technical detail, shows that you are too focused on technique and not enough on the emptiness of meditation. However, I am willing to give you a form of answer.

Initially you can try different forms of evocation. Some will be more “evocative” for you than others, it will be easier. But once you have found the right evocation, try not to change it, so that for your mind this evocation becomes a routine, so that it is easier, simpler. For example, if you are familiar with the action scene you are evoking, visualize, in *Manovijñāna*, it will be easier for you to perform the technique of successive breaks. The same goes for the interior discourse and all the other evocations. It doesn’t matter what you bring up. This or that doesn’t matter. What is important is that you are comfortable in your mental work and can ultimately experience emptiness. It’s the result that counts, regardless of the means, in the end.

**Q.** How long should an MDM last? I suppose you have to repeat a cycle of evocations several times?

**A.** You meditate for the duration and frequency that suits you. It is up to everyone to find the right model of practice, for themselves. Some meditate half an hour, others twenty minutes, others more, others less. And that can vary over time, if you have the time... You have to see meditation as... smoking! Every cigarette kills, it seems. Well, every meditation makes you more alive. Each meditation is like a little click, a little extra unit that appears on your *Karma* meter. Also, at the end of the day, what matters is the total and not when, how much, duration, frequency, etc.

Obviously, as the meditation still lasts a few minutes, the cycles of evocation are repeated. If we take the inner phrase of the *Vijñāna* module, the *boa*, you will evoke it and deconstruct it several times during the twenty minutes or half hour of your meditation. “Several times” will therefore be my final answer (assembly laughter).

**Q.** How can a society's transition to a living religion contribute to social peace?

**A.** Erasing religion from the social field, without forbidding it, of course, can only undoubtedly contribute to appeasement. Dead religions have this tendency to flaunt themselves, flaunt their differences at the same time, causing irritation in another dead religion. If none is displayed, if all remain in the heart of each, appeasement then seems obvious.

However, there are many examples of centuries-old peaceful cohabitation of religions which, unfortunately, today are tearing each other apart. It is quite possible that, in today's world, tolerance is more difficult, because Egos have been greatly reinforced, due to individualistic values and their hypertrophy on the Internet. It may seem paradoxical, but it would be out of intolerance for other dead religions that the Ego would pass to a living, discreet religion, because it is internalized and, ultimately, tolerant.

**Q.** Must one become a "Buddhist" in order to be able to practice living prayer and attain the Divine within? (assembly laughter).

**A.** Certainly! We are going to ask you to fill out a small registration form, which you will sign, so that you are properly identified as a "practicing Buddhist." On the other hand, it is without any guarantee as to your meeting with the Divinity, which will be printed in very small characters at the bottom of the form (assembly laughter). You'll think of my little check too... (assembly laughter).

Seriously. No. You don't have to call yourself a "Buddhist" or anything else. Here we come to the question of the structure of the Ego. To be "Buddhist" means to be part of the "chosen people," to be a client of the temple. Which only feeds your Ego identity. "I am a Christian/Muslim/Buddhist..." or whatever, this identity is a hindrance to advancing on the path of spirituality.

The purpose of living religion, conversely, is to strip the Ego of all its artificial identities. Basically, you don't have to become anyone or anything. Nothing. To become nothing, such is the way, the only way.

**Q.** I would like to know: is living religion as simple as that? Is it reduced only to meditation?

**A.** What more do you want? You dismantle the religious Ego by distancing yourself from the people, the Divinity, the Book and the temple of dead religion, what is left? Living prayer. That's all and that's enough. Everything else is superfluous. God is in you, not elsewhere.

**Q.** How many times a day should one practice meditation and for how long?

**A.** Do you think living prayer is something like medicine? With its dosage? I'm going to write you a prescription: twenty minutes of meditation, three times a day, until the symptoms completely disappear! (assembly laughter). You do exactly what you want! Leave this childish position which consists of waiting for an imaginary master to give instructions as finicky as the frequency and duration of daily meditations!

You have no direction to expect from anyone, because you are your own master. Also, you can practice as you see fit. If you don't practice you may not progress as easily, but if you practice you may progress less slowly. Everyone advances on the spiritual path at their own pace, everyone is their own master in the matter.

**Q.** In fact, living prayer is not really prayer, it is meditation (assembly laughter).

**A.** (Lama laughs). If you mean by "prayer" what we have defined as dead prayer, the prayer of begging, the prayer of the empty repetition of consecrated formulas, then it is certain that this is different from living prayer, from meditation. Meditation is a living prayer in the sense that it connects you to something important in your interiority,

because it is at the heart of this interiority that there is contact with what we could call “the absolute.”

**Q.** To carry out the living prayer, must one first engage in a form of “preparation,” such as a ritual, ablutions, lighting incense...? Or not?

**A.** Or not. I like your alternative: “or not!” (assembly laughter). Again, do as you please, but there are no rules, no recommendations. If you feel you need a ritual, an atmosphere, a special place, go ahead, do as you feel. On the other hand, I would like to point out that meditation is totally independent of environmental conditions, the purpose of meditation being, precisely, to take distance, internally, from the environment. Unlike dead prayer, which needs to modify the environment, with its rituals, temples, assemblies, incense, liturgical songs and music, etc. We thus clearly see all the materiality attached to dead prayer. All material things that are indifferent to living prayer.

You can freely implement material and environmental conditions for meditation, but this is by no means essential. In this matter, what you call “preparation”» for prayer are, in the last resort, only forms of your Ego’s needs. However, after a few years of practice, you will realize that you don’t need anything to practice.

**Q.** You speak of this encounter with the Divine, in interiority. How does this experience look, concretely?

**A.** Any prior representation you may have of this experience is a construction of your Ego. By asking me to describe this experience to you, you are asking me to feed your Ego. Subsequently, instead of getting rid of your Ego over the course of the practice, you will strengthen your Ego which will strive to reconstruct an experience that has been described to it. It’s not the same as experiencing a torture session in the imagination or experiencing it in real life. In fact, the representation of the experience and the expectation of the experience are barriers to living the experience.

So you have to give up any representation of the purpose of meditation. Go forward, without pursuing any goal, without expecting any result. The “encounter with the Divine,” of which I am speaking to you, has no relation to what is imagined in dead religions. I’m not talking about “burning bush,” “intense light” and other special effects of Hollywood cinema. The encounter with the Divine within you is the unspeakable and the inconceivable and the unimaginable, even the unattainable. You will live, one day, this experience, but you will not be able to say anything about it, or even conceive anything about it.

**Q.** I’ve started practicing MDM, advanced meditation techniques and, probably because I’m a beginner, but I’m having some difficulty concentrating on evocations.

**A.** My advice is very simple: drop everything, throw everything away! (assembly laughter). It doesn’t work because you’re so “focused” on technique that all that effort is holding you back. These techniques must be used in a state of inner stripping. If this stripping down is not enough, then it is the Ego that takes over the technique and... Do you know the Ego? It is an athlete, always looking for competition, success, efficiency. For the Ego “it has to work!” Beyond the Ego, we don’t care whether it works or not. Let it go for now and go back to what you know how to do, to your usual path, to the breath, to the mantra, to what you want, what you have learned and what works. Wait, wait until you have further explored the route and you will see later for the advanced techniques.

Living prayer must become for you like a little path that crosses the garden behind your house (it doesn’t matter whether or not you have a house and a garden, it’s a metaphor, I’m talking about an interior garden, a little imaginary). It’s a “small” path and a “small” garden and I say that to show you the modest, simple, unambitious nature of the route. It’s just like, every day, going to the end of the

garden, following the little path that crosses it. Nothing more.

At first, you don't get very far. The path is easy to follow, but a bit like in those dreams where you can't move forward, at the beginning of the meditation practice, you don't go very far, just a meter or two on the path. But over the meditations, days, months and years of practice, you will see that you can go further and further.

The path is not very long, but it takes time to walk it, because you can't help but go slowly. Let's say you have a one and a half ton Ego on your back to carry around (assembly laughter). It's normal for you to drag yourself a little. But, you will see, as the Ego melts, like a block of ice gradually melts under the rays of the sun, it will be easier to move forward. What meditation is about is the "deafferentation" of the Ego, you know, like in those experiences of sensory isolation. There, it is the Ego which is "isolated" in a box, "de-stimulated," and it is normal that it does not like that and that it tries to slow you down in your advancement on the path.

At the end of the path, at the bottom of your garden, there is a pleasant, restful, isolated corner, with a piece of grass, a stone bench for meditation, a fountain, an arbor... And that's it. It's very ordinary. A small path, a small garden and a small quiet corner. So, stop complicating your life with all this "advanced techniques" stuff. We only practice advanced techniques if we are already advanced ourselves so that they are all simple. Otherwise, we wait. You're not going to send a kindergarten child to high school!

**Q.** It seems to me that for very many "believers," this inner game of giving oneself hope by begging something from an outer God is a necessity. I think of all those who live in misery and who only have this last refuge of hope to hold on to. Can they renounce this materialistic version of Divinity?

**A.** You are right. In a way, meditation, living prayer, can be considered a luxury that civilization and a certain economic

and democratic model can grant us. We can suppose that when, every day, we are forced to search a rubbish dump in order to be able to eat at noon, an intercessory God, who gives hope, who gives the illusion that one day there will be an answer to our pleas, that such a God is necessary. However, we can also disagree with this position, which could be described as “fatalistic.”

Because we are entitled to ask ourselves whether, precisely, economic, political and social systems, which admit the existence of very poor and miserable sections of the population, are not quite simply the result of the lack of spiritual education of these populations. The surest way to have at his mercy and at his service armies of destitute slaves is, precisely, to control their minds by inculcating in them a dead religion and vain hopes in an intercessory God.

If, one day, all the slaves of the Earth began to meditate, I am afraid that the creative thought which would emerge from these meditations would reverse the order of things. Also, do not worry about the poor of the world: if they begin to reject the “people,” the “Divinity,” the “Book» and the “temple» and the vain hopes of the “lords,” the worst what can happen to them will be that they will take their destiny into their own hands so that the state of the world changes. There is therefore no need to maintain people in this infantile position of hope, except for those who profit from it...

**Q.** What is “God?”

**A.** If we want to translate the thing with the vocabulary of linguists, “God” is a signifier, without signified and without referent. A word, which does not refer to any underlying concept or to any real thing. It is just a figurative expression, a turn of language, intended to convey an unspeakable, inconceivable, unimaginable experience. An experience that does not exist, at our level of egoic and material existence.

**Q.** Have you yourself, in your spiritual experience, ever encountered God?

**A.** It would be difficult to say... (assembly laughter).

**Q.** Would you say that MDM is the preferred way to achieve the goal of living prayer?

**A.** Your question... raises troubling questions. Because you are already talking about a “privileged path,” a “goal to be achieved...” These are ambitions which are the total antithesis of the purpose of living prayer, of meditation. The path of inner spirituality should in no way be attached to any technique that would guarantee an objective to be achieved. The technique is just a temporary vehicle, which ends up disintegrating, being abandoned, disappearing. Technique is disciplined Ego and it must fade as the Ego is diluted in the open space of *Vidyā*.

The techniques I give you are totally optional. Practice them if you want. In any case, they are not an obligation nor a guarantee, to advance on the path of the inner path. You can practice all the techniques you want: sitting meditation, walking meditation, meditation while washing dishes... Or practice nothing at all. Besides, I’m going to let you in on a secret: if you don’t practice anything at all, it’s because you’ve already arrived! (assembly laughter).



## RELIGIOUS METAPHYSICS

Metaphysics<sup>29</sup> and religion do not mix. One would have the right to ask why, if one considers the *Religio*, the scruple, the doubt, the questioning that this *Religio* carries and which, normally, should completely agree with the requirement of rational and methodical questioning of metaphysics. Now, we know the answer to this misunderstanding: it is that religion, dead religion, no longer possesses anything of the initial *Religio*. Covered with its beliefs, its dogmas, its immovable postulates, its rigid precepts, it resembles a block of stone, which only erosion will succeed to damage. Quite the opposite of metaphysics, therefore, which strives flexibly to question, to reflect, to analyze and, above all, to accept the discomfort of not knowing, knowing everything, right away.

Fascinated as they are by its trappings, its flatterers are far from realizing it, but dead religion is deeply undignified. Undignified of man, of his reason, of what he is in the universe. Dead religion is undignified, because it is the capitulation of intelligence and the victory of lazy and narrow minds. It is not a messiah that must be resurrected,

---

<sup>29</sup> Metaphysics studies the great fundamental questions that arise beyond (or below) physics, such as the existence and nature of the soul, the existence of God, the meaning of religion, morality or of life, the study of Being (ontology), of the status of the universe, of consciousness...

but religion itself that must be reborn to life, become alive again, alive! Perhaps, moreover, this is the real deep meaning of “messianisms” of all kinds: not, as is falsely believed, the advent of a new “cook,” of a new prophet, of a new Buddha or the descent of God on Earth, but rather the emergence of a living religion which, on its own, could embrace metaphysics. I will therefore try to explain to you the possible links between metaphysics and living religion.

Of course, when I speak to you about “metaphysics,” it is about Buddhist metaphysics, whose rigorous analysis and reasoning is the only one capable of making us understand all the dimensions of emptiness. We will therefore refer to a kind of informational metaphysics.

Unlike dead religions, the living religion to which I invite you is based on an authentic metaphysical approach. The deception attached to all materialistic dead religions is, already, that none of them has engaged in any metaphysical process. No dead religion has questioned, nor still questions today, the status of Being, of what exists. None of them ask questions about the Real<sup>30</sup> and Reality<sup>31</sup> (our interpretation of the Real). No materialist religion raises questions about the status of consciousness, none addresses the question of phenomena, noumena, realism and idealism. Religious materialism is satisfied, in matters of metaphysics, with the most common implicit realistic prejudices: there is a reality outside of our thought. There is an objective world to which all humans refer. And that’s all! A metaphysics for small children of the nursery school!

At the same time, we know well now that flushing out the essence of the universe, understanding the deep meaning of what exists is the last of the concerns of materialist religions which, as their epithet indicates, are above all concerned

---

<sup>30</sup> Real is the thing in itself, the world in itself, assumed by the realistic point of view and doubted by the idealist point of view.

<sup>31</sup> Reality is the conscious interpretation of the Real.

with establish and maintain, at all costs, a rigid system of thought, made up of dogmas and beliefs, to serve both the collective interests in controlling generalized deadly metaphysical anxiety and the individual interests of a few individuals hungry for power and material and immaterial satisfactions. We can say, finally, that there is even a fundamental incompatibility between dead religions and metaphysics, by the simple fact that the latter studies the Real in a logical, rational, quasi-scientific way, following a method of reconsidering permanent questions and by sticking to these other rational corpses that are the sciences; whereas materialist religions are content with arbitrary, imaginary, dogmatic and fixed conceptions of the Real.

Indeed, if metaphysics were not renewed in the living water of the fundamental sciences, of the sciences of the universe, it would become a dead metaphysics, just good enough to be used to assert a dead religion. It is for this reason that I have always endeavored, in my teachings, to link ancient Hindu and Buddhist metaphysics to modern physics, in particular quantum mechanics.

The logic of informational metaphysics, which is also that of living religion, is an intuitive logic of the tetralemmas<sup>32</sup>, which leads to the dimension of “vacuity.” This vacuity<sup>33</sup>, which is more than a concept, more than a theory. From the

---

<sup>32</sup> A tetralemma is the intuitive recognition of the validity of the four basic logical propositions: affirmation, negation, affirmation and negation, neither affirmation nor negation.

<sup>33</sup> Vacuity (*Śūnyatā*) means the non-existence of the essence of things, of the world, insofar as everything depends on everything. Emptiness therefore does not mean a “Voidness,” a “nothingness,” but the interdependence of phenomena which makes it an error to say “here is an isolated phenomenon.” There is no such thing as isolated phenomena, which would have their own essence. There is only a phenomenal frame, of phenomena in interdependence (the conditioned co-production), this frame itself being without essence.

Nagarjunian tetralemmas, we discover the **vacuity of the phenomenal world** (all the phenomena which constitute the universe, are interdependent, according to a conditioned co-production, each phenomenon depending on causes-phenomena which give rise to it and each phenomenon being in its turn a cause-phenomenon of other phenomena) and the **vacuity of the self** (which associates the phenomenological reduction<sup>34</sup> which reduces the self to a pure flow of consciousness, with the reduction to emptiness<sup>35</sup> which reduces the self-consciousness to an aggregative metaphenomenon of phenomena).

The Ego is a little crafty, it leaves no stone unturned. Explain to it the vacuity of phenomena and even its own emptiness and it will make beautiful theories from which it will still feed. Also, Buddhist metaphysics goes to the end in its work of emptying. For “vacuity” itself, if one wants to see it as a conception, must be slain and evacuated, it is the vacuity of vacuity, it is the *Śūnyatīśūnya* of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, it is this discourse which announces the Voidness, only the Voidness, the nothingness, which no longer means anything, which leads to the silence of an inner peace.

To a rational Western mind or to a follower of one of the materialistic religions, this “vacuity” is simultaneously frightening, absurd and, ultimately, totally misunderstood. Vacuity is not an empty bottle and the disappearance of the bottle as well. You have to be serious: any theory that would claim to reduce the Real to a kind of “nihilism” would indeed be absurd. So this is not the way you have to understand vacuity.

---

<sup>34</sup> A metaphysical approach which consists of bringing everything existing back to the pure flow of consciousness.

<sup>35</sup> A metaphysical approach which consists in understanding the fundamental phenomenon of consciousness after having “emptied” it of all phenomena.

*Śūnyatā* only attacks theories, concepts, not the Real. Vacuity is just a turn of mind. It is a suspension of any statement regarding the Real. Suspension of all thought, of all conceptions and of all theories, including, obviously and without doubt primarily, the suspension of all religious belief. Vacuity is a direct leap from *Vijñāna* (mental formations and constructs) to *Vidyā* (fundamental openness of the mind).

I have already told you this story of the pilgrim who questions Buddha about the existence of God. And the Awakened One's eloquent silence was the only response. This answer was a dramatization of vacuity (God is a theory, it does not really exist) and the vacuity of vacuity (even this conception of the absence of God is, itself, nothing, it does not exist). Which brings us to the tetralemma of "God:"

**"God exists, God does not exist, God exists and God does not exist, neither God exists nor God does not exist."**

Or yet:

**"Neither God exists, nor God does not exist, neither God exists and God does not exist, nor neither God exists, nor nor God does not exist."**

The tetralemmas ask us to abandon our rational thinking, not to adhere to a belief, but to implement an intuitive understanding, *Prajñā*. A tetralemma is not an articulated thought. If you look inwardly at its four propositions as four stages of an articulated thought, you are wrong.

Imagine a delicious pastry (according to what is on sale on the menu of the restaurant where it is served), made up of four elements: a biscuit, a cream, a fruit and chocolate (this is also what is mentioned on the menu card). Imagine that, by joke or unconsciousness, the waiter brings you on a plate the

four ingredients side by side. Admittedly, it's still edible, but it's not at all the dessert you expected. This dessert is the subtle marriage of the four elements according to a pastry recipe. It is this fruit that has cooked in the biscuit dough, it is this cream that envelops the scents, it is this chocolate, poured over the whole, which will create the spicy note of the pastry. This is how we taste, appreciate and eat a pastry. This is how you apprehend the flavor of a tetralemma!

You must appeal to your intuitive intelligence, to *Prajñā*, to reach a unified vision of the four propositions: "God-exists-God-does-not-exist-God-exists-and-God-does-not-exist-nor-God-exists-nor-God-does-not-exist." The religious Ego thus gets rid of its beliefs by burning them in the fire of the tetralemmas. "Neutralized" tetralemmas, because their four propositions are accepted at the same time, which leads the Ego into the field of undecidability.

The metaphysics of living religion is based on this neutralization of tetralemmas, which is also a neutralization of thought, of the mind, of the Ego. Neutralization which is perhaps best experienced in the negative: "Neither-God-exists-nor-God-does-not-exist-nor-God-exists-and-God-does-not-exist-nor-nor-God-exists-neither-nor-God-does-not-exist. This is how the neutralized tetralemma joins the very experience of living prayer in *Vidyā*. The experience of vacuity. Living prayer, meditation, like tetralemmas and *Prajñā*, are mental tools to enable you to intuitively experience vacuity, *Vidyā*.

Another metaphysical aspect related to living religion concerns our relationship to the world. There is, on one side, *Nirvāṇa*, the experience of living prayer, vacuity and, on the other side, there is *Samsāra*, the world of desires and action. When we say, intentionally, "on one side... on the other side," it is to clearly mark the illusory duality of this separation. This is a very "religion-dead" conception of *Nirvāṇa* and *Samsāra*. On the one hand the meditation, on the other hand the dishes to do. On the one hand prayer, on the other hand

going to kill your neighbor. This separation, this fundamental discrimination, is cinema, an optical illusion, a vast joke, but the consequences of which can be serious.

In fact, the essential message, undoubtedly the greatest of the messages of Buddhism, is this non-separation between *Nirvāṇa* and *Samṣāra*. *Nirvana is Samṣāra* and *Samṣāra is Nirvāṇa*. Such is, not the “truth,” but the outcome of any conception, of any theory. Indeed, it is this separation which is the matrix of all conceptions, which externalizes interiority, which materializes religion. The first spiritual Wild West with, on one side, the cowboys and, on the other, the Indians, it is this erroneous separation between meditation, living prayer, on the one hand, and action in the world, on another side. Separation which is incarnated, if I may say so, entirely with “dead” prayer. The dead prayer is the mental act of an illusion: the belief in the power of the mind over matter, the belief in a saving Divinity, the belief in any “communication” with this Divinity.

When one has understood that *Samṣāra* is *Nirvāṇa* and that *Nirvāṇa* is *Samṣāra*, then this separation between living prayer and actions in the world dissolves. Which leads naturally, not to consider that doing the dishes or killing one’s neighbor is a prayer! A form of meditation! Because then we are at the stage of decomposed pastry on the plate. It is the holy war, the misunderstood *jihad*, externalized in a struggle for territories and deadly ideologies. The real *jihad* is the fight against one’s own Ego, whereas any external or exteriorized fight only nourishes and strengthens the Ego. Quite the opposite of a *jihad* therefore.

What then does this non-discrimination between *Samṣāra* and *Nirvāṇa* mean? “Doing the dishes” or “killing your neighbor” is a prayer if we can renounce the fruit, the results of our actions. If action in the world is as detached as meditation on the breath. If each action is considered as a tetralemma. If it is thus neutralized.

**“Do the dishes, don’t do the dishes, do the dishes and don’t do the dishes, neither do the dishes nor don’t do the dishes.”**

**“Kill your neighbor, don’t kill your neighbor, kill your neighbor and don’t kill your neighbor, neither kill your neighbor nor don’t kill your neighbor.”**

Do you want them negative? This might be useful to you:

**“Neither do the dishes, nor do not do the dishes, nor do the dishes and do not do the dishes, neither do the dishes nor do not do the dishes.”**

**“Neither kill your neighbor, nor do not kill your neighbor, nor kill your neighbor and do not kill your neighbor, nor do kill your neighbor nor nor do kill your neighbor.”**

Thus renouncing the fruit of actions (which corresponds to the extinction of the Ego), an inner freedom and a new creative intelligence awaken. In this space of enlightenment, the lineage of causes and effects is perceived as a whole, like a block, a block universe, that of the informational matrix. Thus appear the causes which led to “doing the dishes,” the causes which led to “killing one’s neighbor.”

At the same time (remember, the pastry, all the ingredients are there at the same time), at the same time also appear the consequences of “doing the dishes” and “killing your neighbor.” Which finally (and at the same time) gives this inspiration of the choice, to “do the dishes/not to do the dishes,” to “kill your neighbor/not kill your neighbor,” And again, I am presenting things to you here in an academic and simplistic way. In fact, you have to consider the lineage of the possible. Don’t forget the multiverse. For instance :



**“to do the dishes”**

**“do not do the dishes”**

**“have someone else do the dishes”**

**“defer doing the dishes”**

**“do only part of the dishes”**

**“throw away the dishes”**

And so on... Another example:

**“kill your neighbor”**

**“don’t kill your neighbor”**

**“go talk to your neighbor”**

**“sue one’s neighbor”**

**“forgive your neighbor”**

**“ignore your neighbor”**

And so on... Do you see the kind of renunciation of the fruit of actions, the kind of *jihad* I am telling you about? It is completely contrary to the reckless impulses of an Ego heated with the wine of religious ideologies. Don’t forget the three great impediments, the three wines with which the Egos get drunk: emotions, desires and beliefs. Egos love the shimmer and excitement that comes from emotions; they love the fascination and anticipatory excitement that desires give them; they love beliefs and their conceptual phantasmagoria. These three great impediments are the ordinary food of the Ego and, while nourishing it, they enclose the Ego in the illusion of the self, the world, actions and their results.

Let us return to the three aquatic metaphors of living prayer. These three metaphors apply to mental phenomena, but they apply equally well to phenomena of the world,

because there is no separation, from a metaphysical point of view, between mental phenomena and phenomena of the world.

In the metaphor of the ocean, the technique of meditation is represented as a small submarine, just intended to facilitate our descent into the heart of the mind, but which will then be abandoned. The technique on the breath (being aware of the breath, of the air which enters and leaves), for example, will make it possible to control the mental phenomena, to take distance with these phenomena and to see them calm down.

By transposing onto the phenomena of the world, the equivalent of the "little submarine" is the letting go, the abandonment of the world, the renunciation, or at least the distancing of the world. We know that in Buddhism this renunciation has nothing to do with asceticism or other forms of extreme deprivation. These false renunciations are food of choice for the Ego, which becomes a sort of martyr of renunciation. In the extreme, an Ego can even feed on the renunciation of its physical life, sustain itself on its material suicide.

The true renunciation of the phenomena of the world therefore does not consist in cutting oneself off from the world, but in entering into the dance of the world, in the circle of phenomena, with this interior detachment of renunciation of the fruit of actions. Each phenomenon is welcomed, like breathing, in an ordinary and detached being there. We are in the world, but we maintain an interior distance from the world and its phenomena.

The metaphor of non-effort is this mist that forms on a cold window. The mist condenses into water droplets. In doing so, it makes no effort, uses no energy. On the contrary, the steam transfers its heat energy to the cold glass. The vapor gives up its energy, it makes no effort and this is the way to meditate, in an abandonment, without any effort.

It is the same in our encounter with the phenomena of the world. No effort is required. See all this beautiful and vain display of energy to “do the dishes,” to “kill your neighbor,” to “pray to an intercessory god,” to “take offense at a caricature,” to “fight against this or against that...” The purpose of living prayer is that of non-effort, inside as well as outside. A kind of “negentropy,” with the cooling of your relationship to the phenomena of the world and an organizational simplification of your relationship to phenomena.

The phenomena are always there, you do not avoid them (is it possible? No). Your actions are always there, you act (is not acting possible? No). But you naturally choose an “effortless” action. Don’t get me wrong: I’m not telling you that you can’t get out of bed anymore, because it would be too much of an effort to lift your own weight on both legs! “Effortless” here literally means: without involvement of the Ego. It is the Ego which is always striving, it is it which is passionate, which is always a little too agitated, whether it is a question of lifting a piece of furniture or picking a flower. Beyond the Ego, the action on the phenomena of the world is described as “without effort,” when it is no longer an egoic stake.

It’s the same idea, ultimately, that we find with the metaphor of the river. Faced with turbulent mental phenomena, among which you are struggling, you make the choice to no longer struggle (non-effort), to let yourself be carried by the current and thus, to gradually favor an interior distance, to reach the edge of the river and be able to contemplate it from the outside. You have not sought to stop the course of the river of your mind in any way.

It can be the same with the phenomena of the world. It’s not about wanting to stop them, to oppose them, to fight against them, and so on... It’s about letting yourself be carried away by the phenomena of the world, as if they were an inspiration, a creative muse. Each phenomenon in the world

that touches you is an opportunity to learn, first of all about welcoming and then about the interior space, between yourself and the world. And one day you will sit by the side of the great river of worldly phenomena and watch it flow.

Informational metaphysics sheds light on the path we have the possibility to follow. We are as if imprisoned (our Ego is imprisoned) in a net of causes and effects formed by both mental phenomena and the phenomena of the universe, of which our mind is a part. This net of causes and effects is also a net of illusions, insofar as it is everywhere reinforced by conceptions, theories, beliefs. And, in this net, we experience emotions, desires and our beliefs become consistent "representations of things" of "visions of the world." And, in this net, finally, we fight for the survival of our Ego, to ensure its permanence, but also its way of life, its material and spiritual advantages.

And, when we want to change something in this net, we have to exert effort, concentrate, exert energy and intense activity. Big efforts, often, for modest results, or no results, which reinforces our disappointment and our determination. Suddenly, we find ourselves locked in a vicious circle, that of the effort which feeds the effort, until something cracks or that we ourselves crack!

It is that the mental and phenomenal universe is endowed with a formidable inertia, linked to the fact of the interdependence of all phenomena. The fact that all phenomena are linked to each other by an underlying "informational matrix." Not only the phenomena, but also these particular, aggregative phenomena, which are the Egos. All linked to each other by the informational matrix. Billions of Egos fight against each other, to obtain the same pastry. All these Egos oppose each other, in multiple antagonisms, which make them adversaries, competitors, men (or women ) to be beaten.

Thus, the message of a living religion is not that of attachment to the material world. It is not that of the action

to be accomplished in this world, this universe. Certainly, we can have attachments and we can act. Sometimes even we **have** to have attachments and we **have** to act. However, have attachments “without attaching yourself” and act “without acting.” For attachments and actions in this universe are pure illusions. Attach yourself as little as possible, act as sparingly as possible, for it is attachments and restlessness that bring about, by the law of cause and effect, many consequences, some positive, but others negative. Also, to inconsiderate attachments and hasty actions, prefer the return to interiority, the development of an interior space, the least karmic effort. Such is also the way of living prayer.

**Q.** I noted that at no time did you tell us, “You will not kill your neighbor.” Is this normal? (assembly laughter).

**A.** Well done! This is an excellent remark, because it will allow me to emphasize once again all the difference, this time from a moral point of view, between dead religion and living religion.

A dead religion would hit you with a “prohibition,” a “commandment:” “You shall not kill your neighbor.” Vaguely, we feel that behind this commandment hides a very egocentric preoccupation: “as I do not wish to be killed myself, let us be fair and do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you.” And all religious “morality” is, by and large, based on this reasoning.

Afterwards, religions have a problem, a big problem, it is that any commandment of this kind suffers from some exceptions, more or less legitimate. For example, you have the scenario of self-defense: my neighbor, taken in a fit of madness, seeks to kill me or to kill someone in my family or someone else. Am I following the command to the letter? Am I turning the other cheek, as it is written somewhere?<sup>36</sup> From there, a dead religion may very well give you a second commandment in contradiction to the first, something like:

---

<sup>36</sup> Bible, New Testament, Matthew, 5, 39.

"If your neighbor attacks you, seize him and kill him<sup>37</sup>." It's logical, normal, and besides, any secular legal code would tell you the same thing: in normal times one does not have the right to kill, except in self-defense.

All of this means that dead religion is at that "normal" level of a civil or penal code. It's its "materialistic" side that wants that. A dead religion is, ultimately, very down to earth. You find the two types of commandments in all the great dead religions: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism...

The approach to "possible murder" is quite different from the side of a living religion. I didn't give you a command, because my subject is situated elsewhere, although the result, ultimately, is identical: "we must not kill," with the exception of self-defense, of course. Instead of a simple commandment which, for some cunning or devious minds, can easily be circumvented or misinterpreted, I propose instead to examine the project of "killing your neighbor" from a metaphysical point of view.

Maybe you have good reasons for wanting to kill your neighbor. His sound system in the garden bothers you, he puts his garbage in front of your door or other similar things. The metaphysical examination of the situation consists here in bringing you back to: "my Ego is disturbed, irritated, by my neighbor." It's a bit like the exercise with the fly: Ego has a furious desire to crush it with a blow of its hand, boom! The fly is over! But the exercise of meditation intended to distance you from Ego, you know it: to feel the fly, to condense your mind on the fly which runs on your arm or the end of your nose, until you arrive at the "indifferent feeling" of the fly.

It can be the same with your neighbor. Ultimately, this disruptive neighbor is your master, creating a situation that is your master, in the sense of learning something and moving forward on the path. How can you meditate on this

---

<sup>37</sup>Inspired by the Koran, surah 4, verse 91.

and perceive your neighbor in an “indifferent perception,” like a tetralemma? You see it’s a bit more complicated than just telling yourself “not to kill,” “not to do what you would not want done to you.” At the same time, if you see the guy arriving with a big knife and a determined look, I’m not going to tell you to stay seated in zazen either! Unless you are a very, very great master! But in this case, I have nothing to teach you, either...

**Q.** You have repeatedly pointed out that materialistic religions convey a materialistic and personalistic view of Divinity. However, all the great monotheistic texts insist on the transcendent character of God. What do you think?

**A.** You are absolutely right. In all the Books of the great dead religions, the transcendence of God is mentioned. This shows us that at the foundation of these monotheistic religions, there was still something alive, the testimony of a living experience of transcendence. These religions have their origin in the experience of a cook and, in the transmission of this experience, “God” is presented as a transcendence. The problem is that a few verses later, God suddenly turns into “Superman-who-is-in-heaven,” so we end up with a personalized “God,” who is given one, ninety-nine or thousands of names, who acts, experiences positive or negative feelings (love, mercy, forgiveness, but also anger, hatred, jealousy, etc.), which makes it a real character, far from transcendence.

You will tell me that all these are metaphors, figurative expressions. Okay: let’s say that “God” is just a parable misunderstood or taken literally. The problem, the second problem, is that the dead religions are very far from presenting these “figurative expressions,” these “parables” as such. On the contrary, their whole catechism is to present the Divinity as a true entity, a personalistic entity. Take the case of prayer. It is obvious that dead religions maintain the idea that prayer is addressed to “someone,” one “prays to someone,” one “orders one’s toys from Santa’s catalog,” one

“recites by heart one’s incantations towards someone” and so on. So you’re right, in the sense that all dead religions were alive to begin with. But, afterwards... The transcendence of God was misguided and lost and it was not for nothing! Economics and politics have taken over living religion to kill it and turn it into the “monkeyry” that all the great religions are today.

**Q.** Finally, to hope for peace on Earth, shouldn’t we consider the disappearance, pure and simple, of dead religions?

**A.** By speaking of the “disappearance” of dead religions, you enter into the idea of a militant fight, of a form of violence which will in turn lead to violence. There is no need to go to war against dead religions. This would again be feeding the Ego. The “fight” is internal and concerns each of us individually. However, assuming that you are referring to certain inter-religious conflicts, I would like to remind you that these conflicts are very often apparently “religious.” Because often it is only a political instrumentalization of religion.

Then, in an intercultural and interreligious context, we have the choice between accepting or not the display of religions. In certain peaceful contexts, each religion can be displayed in front of the others without this posing a problem. In other contexts, egotistical sensitivities make it preferable that the religious display be as discreet as possible, provided that each religion is in the same boat.

Finally, there is one last point of view, which you may be thinking of. As part of an individual approach towards the living religion, it is possible to begin abandoning externalization by letting go of the external signs of religion. Begin to cultivate “being nothing.” But it is indeed an individual approach, but in no way the imposition of a diktat. While emphasizing that, in the social context of a tense, conflicting inter-religiousness, the multiplication of this



modesty of the religious Ego, renouncing any display, can greatly contribute to a return to appeasement and dialogue.

**Q.** When we see the importance of the figure of the prophets in dead religions, is it possible to abandon this? Or are there cooks more recommendable than others in order to support a living religion?

**A.** Certainly, from the point of view of a dead religion, cooks are essential, essential references. They are the ones who found the whole system, they are even at its origin. Afterwards, the status of their real existence does not matter. Whether they had a historical reality or whether they are pure legends, fabricated by a collective and enriched over time, is not so important. It is not the reality that counts here, but the system of thought and we know very well that unlike the rational sciences, religions do not need objective foundations, because faith and beliefs are enough.

Now, from the point of view of a living religion, the paradigm shift is radical: not only does the authenticity of cooks matter little, not only is there no one who is better than another (a comparative has absolutely no relevance here), but moreover, the point of living religion is that the only valid "prophet" is within us. Just as "Divinity» is at the heart of our interiority, we are our own prophet, our own master. Finally, not only... Let's not forget that we have a second master, they are the situations of existence. They are even the first of the masters! The situations of existence provide us with all the necessary learning elements. Secondly, our inner master will, more or less effectively, help us learn from the situations of existence. This is how things work from the point of view of living religion. You see that the cooks are totally secondary here. Nor are we saying that cooks must be rejected at all costs. Sometimes they can be helpful, sometimes... But other times it would be good to keep them at a distance and consult the cook within.



## **2. MEDITATE IN THE UNIVERSE**



## BUDDHISM AND MEDITATION

Passing away in October 2014, Scarlet Lama left behind many emails that attest to an abundant and stimulating communication activity with many people around the world. When the questions of legal succession were resolved, a whole team set out to explore his computer and analyze all the documents that could prolong his teaching beyond death. Thus, at the instigation of his faithful friends, I had the privilege of supervising this project of compiling and publishing some of the many emails that Scarlet Lama has been able to exchange over the years. May all these contributors be thanked here for their excellent work of translation, analysis, sorting and layout. All the most interesting emails for the passionate reader of Buddhism, meditation and science of the universe, have been classified into four categories which form the chapters of this second part: Buddhism and meditation, Buddhism in practice, Buddhism and religion, Buddhism and science.

May Scarlet Lama's posthumous emails be of great and precious help to you and guide you on the path of meditation and spirituality, towards enlightenment to ultimate reality.

**Correspondent (COR):** I lack attendance. I meditate for three or four days, then events make it impossible for me to do so. Then I resume, I give up, and so on. How can I be more serious and consistent in my meditation practice?

**Scarlet Lama (SL):** Take meditation with... meditation! Just as in meditation we don't worry about the thoughts that arise and we let them pass, in the same way, we don't worry about the days without and we rejoice in the days with. We are not always "ready" to meditate. There are times when it is also necessary to decant. Meditation is life and it is best to see the practice holistically over a lifetime. And then, I want to say that meditation is like smoking... backwards: each cigarette kills, each meditation brings its benefits, regardless of the frequency of the meditations.

**COR:** I've been practicing meditation for about a month. What made me start this "discipline" are the thoughts that I could have throughout my days. Thoughts that haunted me. I could not get rid of it and therefore I could no longer enjoy the present moment, my loved ones, etc.

Thus, since I started meditation, I realize the benefits that it can bring. Like better accepting others, no longer judging my thoughts and above all living in the present moment, accepting both the bad and the good that may arise. And simply enjoying the smallest details of life.

Unfortunately for a week, I can no longer meditate. Not for lack of motivation, but because I feel like I'm practicing badly. I'm not sure if I'm doing the right thing, which is quite frustrating. How to get over that?

I'm wondering. Since I started practicing, I read a lot about it. I read that there are several types of meditation. Meditation through breathing, the body-scan, the sounds and smells that surround us. One could even meditate while doing all sorts of activities during the day. Unfortunately, I don't know whether to practice all these techniques at the same time. And then, how to meditate while doing activities at the same time?

**SL:** The search for perfection, for doing well, etc. are the expression of the ego. I remind you that the ego is defined as

the “simian” part of our self. The ego is like a little monkey that jumps around all the time and always watches itself jumping. Also, disregard these scruples of the ego and continue to practice daily, without guilt, without questioning, without anything, in fact.

Regarding the techniques of meditation, they are indeed innumerable. Each “master” has developed his own. Developing a new technique is, very often, for a master, a way of distinguishing himself, of ensuring his business and it is still a matter of ego. The master’s!

In fact, you must distinguish between technique and “meditation.” I suggest the following metaphor: a multitude of paths that all lead to the same place. So it doesn’t matter which path you follow, they all lead to the same point. Initially (since you are a beginner), explore a little, but not too long. Avoid scattering yourself in multiple techniques, but make a definitive choice, according to what you like the most, what you feel most comfortable in. Trust your inspiration. Then, persist and don’t listen to the sirens of other techniques, of the super-technique to the latest fad. These are, again and again, the calls of the ego. What Trungpa Rinpoche calls “spiritual materialism<sup>38</sup>.” The ego loves anything new and exotic, but that’s a trap, of course.

Finally, you are no doubt wondering what the ultimate point is, towards which all the techniques converge? I want to tell you: go there yourself, you will see well and you will not regret having deepened a single technique. And, along the way, when you see the technique dissolving, eventually disappearing, you’ll know you’re on the right path.

**COR:** Reading in the forums how people practice meditation, so diligently! I realize that’s not what I’m doing at all. I don’t practice “meditation” in the, shall we say, formal sense, in a

---

<sup>38</sup> Chögyam Trungpa, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*. Shambhala Publications, Berkeley, 1973.

diligent way. It's not very regular. On the other hand, I think of practicing meditation in another form. Can you tell me if contemplation is a form of meditation?

More specifically, it was my walks in the forest that allowed me to reconnect with myself and with Nature and I must say that each time I have wonderful experiences. These, shall we say, "meditative" walks have a very positive effect on me. I even have strange experiences, like energy flows, when I come into contact with certain trees. Is this also meditating?

**SL:** I'm not sure there's a difference between meditation and contemplation. Meditation includes different modalities of "contemplation," depending on the technique used. So contemplation is one of the modalities of meditation. As for your experiences with trees, know that meditation is accompanied by parasitic mental phenomena, which does not mean secondary. Such phenomena feed on people's beliefs. These strange phenomena can help for a time, but it is good not to abuse them, nor to get lost in them. At some point along the spiritual path, one must remember that the ultimate path is vacuity.

**COR:** I practice meditation preferably in the form of contemplations of Nature. Nature which is so beautiful! Practicing on something else, for example, on breathing, on the "vacuity", seems very austere to me. What do you think?

**SL:** You know, Nature is not "beautiful," in itself, it is just what it is. We find it "beautiful" because our mind dresses it in beauty.

We find this, for example, in human relations. We notice that when we arrive in a new place, with new faces, the first few days, many people seem strange to us. We may even find some to be ugly. But after a week or two, the clothing of the mind, carried by camaraderie, friendships, affinities, makes people all "beautiful."



So beauty is something internal, subjective. This is also why everyone reacts in their own way to the same phenomenon and finds it “beautiful” or “not beautiful,” according to their own resonance. The question to ask (and the first to ask is probably Plato) where does this feeling of “beauty” come from?

By practicing meditation, we find that this feeling of beauty helps the meditative state, that it can induce it, be connected to it. Some, with a religious inclination, will see in it a proof of a superior perfection, of the presence of “God.”

For my part, not being a believer, I want to see in it a functioning of our mind. “Beauty” is fabricated by our own mind. It is not outside, but inside of us. This beauty leads to meditation, but I also believe that meditation leads to this feeling of beauty.

It reminds me of that moving scene in the film “American beauty<sup>39</sup>,” the scene of the plastic bag twirling around, swirling in a current of air. One of the characters in the script, a young man, then feels things like this: “Sometimes there’s so much beauty in the world I feel like I can’t take it... and my heart is going to cave in...<sup>40</sup>.” We have here a good example of this “beauty of the world” which is none other than an effect of the mind itself. But it’s interesting!

**COR:** What do you think of the “guided” meditations that are springing up everywhere? Is it a new fad?

**SL:** Most certainly, it is indeed a new fad. And like all fashions, we would do well to be wary of it. In fact, all of these meditations are passive meditations, just like watching television. These are “media” meditations. Your ego is totally taken care of there, like an exercise in suggestion, a hypnosis.

---

<sup>39</sup> *American Beauty*, Sam Mendes, 1999.

<sup>40</sup> <https://youtu.be/V73598mBfKY>

They all promise and we find there, it seems, a well-being, relaxation, an evacuation of stress and a host of benefits. There are currents, schools, masters, celebrities. You can find it everywhere online, on YouTube, on Facebook, or you can buy audio CDs. It's big business!

However, I am afraid that such "media" meditations are in no way real meditation. They are simply hypnotic exercises intended to relax you by placing you in states between waking and sleeping. Some go even further in mental manipulation by suggesting fantastic things, "out of the body" and other so-called mystical experiences. This is all illusion, of course. And that drives a whole thriving business. We can say that "media" meditations are the new religion of the twenty-first century.

The true path of meditation does not pass through such media. It does not follow any media. We don't have to follow this or that suggestion. This is good for small children, to whom a story is told in the evening, to help them find sleep. And, if the fashion took hold and developed, it is undoubtedly that many of us are at the stage of the small child, waiting for a parental word to reassure them and lull them to sleep. But this is not the way of authentic meditation.

The authentic path of meditation is above all solitary and autonomous. The practice is simple and silent. The course is steep and does not pursue any goal. A goal-directed meditation is what takes us away from any state of true meditation. The technique is only a temporary prosthesis. For meditation, non-aim leads to the abandonment of all techniques and to vacuity. For it is this vacuity, or non-duality, that is true meditation.

**COR:** I have read that when you meditate, you have to give up judging, choosing and getting something. A famous author even says that we should "Not Giving a Sh\*t<sup>41</sup>," do nothing.

---

<sup>41</sup> Fabrice Midal, *The French Art of Not Giving a Sh\*t: Cut the Crap and*

But then, how to meditate well and what is the point of meditating? What does it bring us?

**SL:** One day, a pilgrim asked the Buddha this way:

– **Pilgrim:** What does it bring to meditate?

– **Buddha:** ...

– **Pilgrim:** ... uh!

– **Buddha:** ...

– **Pilgrim:** Sorry, maybe this is not a good question...

– **Buddha, compassionate:** Meditation consists in doing nothing in order to obtain nothing.

– **Pilgrim:** I understood, so if it's to get nothing, one might as well do nothing.

– **Buddha:** This is “doing nothing.” You want to try?

– **Pilgrim:** Uh, I don't know what to do.

– **Buddha:** It's simple, you sit there, you close your eyes and you do nothing.

– **Pilgrim:** I've already tried, it doesn't work. I always do something.

– **Buddha:** You see, you don't know how to “do nothing.” So, in the beginning, meditation is doing “almost nothing,” like paying attention to your breathing or repeating a little mantra. At first you are told that it is to calm you down, de-stress you, make you more focused, smarter and so on. In the beginning, meditation is doing almost nothing to have lots of positive effects. But you will see, later, that meditation is good to do nothing to obtain nothing and that the effects are only “positive side effects,” nothing important.

And the Buddha closed his eyes and seemed to do nothing to get nothing. And the Pilgrim went away... perplexed...

**COR:** I really need your support to maintain a regularity in the practice of meditation. I find it very difficult to do it alone and I'm frustrated.

Paradoxically, I clearly understand the benefits, because I sometimes meditate informally or when I talk about it to relatives. I think I have difficulty letting go of my thoughts that have taken over my ability to be right in the present moment and to feel it. Is it normal to experience things like that at the beginning of the practice?

**SL:** Of course, at the beginning, things happen with meditation, a bit like you say. At first, it's not stable. We have "fruitful» periods when we meditate a lot and well. And then, less dynamic periods where we tend to put things aside and plunge back into the maze of the ego. It is completely normal as a phenomenon. The path can be depicted as winding around a mountain, gradually ascending it. From time to time there is a stagnation or a small descent. But it's not serious or catastrophic, because afterwards we can see ourselves going back up to the summits.

The principle that I propose is to say that, in any case, each meditation brings something positive, whether it lasted five seconds, five minutes or an hour. And this benefit is inscribed in us for life. It's never lost. It's like knowing how to ride a bike. We can stop ten years, we always know how to do it.

To ensure regularity, it is necessary to agree to recognize as valid even very short meditations and to get out of guilt and nervousness about oneself and how "bad" one is. The trip lasts a lifetime, so we have time. And the time...

As for the thoughts that stick to consciousness, that is the heart of the process. The more you push your thoughts away, the more you will feed them. "Letting go of your thoughts" is not caring that they are there. Nor is it making an effort to stop them or to engage in some other "thought destroying" process.

To let go is rather to let your thoughts be, but without identifying with them, without making them yours. Sometimes we talk about this solution: “watching thoughts flow like you watch a river flow.” We are like sitting on the edge of our thoughts and we watch them flow.

The problem, for beginners, is that this injunction must in no way be a voluntary act. If you do this on purpose, it won't work. The blow of the river happens, all by itself, precisely because there is no “will to.” What works is the attentional medium you have chosen and the exercise of your repeated, gentle, but steady attention on that medium. It could be breathing or something else . “Letting go” of your thoughts will happen with attention to the medium, but not if you force yourself to let go of your thoughts. I almost want to paraphrase the saying about the shortest jokes are the best: the shortest meditations are the best... Just make it a lot, lot, lot...

**COR:** I've been meditating with an app on my smartphone for three months. Everything was fine until I started the program with visualizations, like “imagine you are next to a small river... imagine you are meditating in a place you like...” etc. I don't know why, but it completely baffled me. I am no longer in the present moment, but in an imaginary elsewhere. Something that is somehow not believable. What do you think?

**SL:** Visualization practices are an integral part of meditative practices and are found in the oldest teachings. The factors of personal disposition (or incapacity) with regard to imagination and visualization also exist. Some people can easily visualize, imagine. For others it is more difficult. And, conversely, certain traits of mental pathology (autism, psychosis) can naturally and spontaneously predispose to visualization. Beyond that, it seems to me that visualization practices are reserved for advanced practitioners.

When the person has not yet reached deep enough levels of meditation, an attempt at visualization may fail, which will irritate their ego and disrupt the very process of meditation.

In deep meditation, the mind is particularly condensed and, sometimes, spontaneous visualizations (hallucinoses, as shrinks would say) can occur. In these states it then becomes easy to provoke this tendency of the mind to visualize, and then to direct these visualizations. However, as it is said in the Buddhist teachings, these are only “constructs of the mind,” phenomena. It has no more value than a mantra, a sensation, the breath, an incantation or evocation or any other medium of meditation. The deep path is beyond, visualization is only one aid among others to achieve it. So if you never take this path (or only later in your meditation journey) it really doesn't matter.

**COR:** What about the links between meditation and sexuality? Tantra...

**SL:** We repeat over and over again that meditation is not just a seated, motionless posture, but that it can also be part of action at any time. Meditation while walking, gardening, washing dishes, etc. And then, why not, during sexual activity? Perhaps not alone, because the latter asks too much of the mind for its support, but in shared sexuality, where the body of the other is the support and where the mind can therefore free itself in a meditative experience of being-there.

This approach has, of course, existed for centuries and many books deal with it. Type “tantra” into a media merchant site and you will see a host of books, each more explicit than the next.

Tantric sexuality, like meditation or yoga, only comes into its own when it is part of daily life, in life and in personal relationships. For once, you will not be told that the spiritual path is lonely.

However, unless you are very lucky, you will find yourself facing the limits of the specifications. Imagine, if you yourself are a follower of spiritual sex, you need a partner who meets the following criteria: 1) sensitized and practicing in spirituality; 2) comfortable enough with his/her sexuality; 3) eager to discover love and sexuality dimension of spirituality; 4) that you like each other, that you are in affinity and in love with each other; 5) and let it last! Because, of course, just like meditation, you don't establish a tantric sexual relationship overnight.

But sexuality, tantric, spiritual or not, is sexuality. With its limits... One day, you will see the pretty illusions of tantric sex. In fact, the spiritual path is very lonely, in the end, whatever one thinks or says about it...

**COR:** I have been practicing meditation for some time now and find that it helps me a lot. I have a friend who has been in very serious personal difficulties for a few months. This person is young and not very open to all that is spiritual. Still, I think meditation might just help her. But I don't know how to approach it with him. More generally, how to encourage other people, who do not necessarily have a revelation or the desire themselves, to meditate? Thanks in advance for your advice.

**SL:** I'm afraid there's nothing to be done. An ego in difficulty is often blocked, stuck, in a series of refusals: refusal to be helped, refusal to position itself as not knowing, refusal of what is new, refusal to reflect, in short, refusal of all the means which could help it solve its problems. The Buddhist metaphor is the "animal world."

From there, offering meditation or a book of spirituality is doomed in advance to failure. You have to realize that everyone is on a line of destiny and wanting to force things for others is futile. On the other hand, the idea of an exemplification can sometimes work. One day, perhaps, he will be seduced, will he have a desire when he sees the

positive effects in you. At that time, he will be ready and things will go on their own. Being “ready” is the key word.

**COR:** I have been practicing meditation for almost three years. I would like to know where I am. Are there typical steps to go through? Which ones?

**SL:** There are different ways to describe the stages of meditation. In particular depending on whether we are referring to internal processes or whether we are aiming more at interactions with the world.

As an inner path, there are usually four stages. First, the set up. It's about making room for meditation in your life, which for many people is no small feat and can be time consuming. Then, it is the stage of stabilization, relaxation and condensation. You learn to fix your mind on the technique, the support. Then comes the opening stage. We drop technique and meditation is a “being-there.” We are approaching or entering into meditation on the Voidness. Finally, meditation becomes crazy wisdom. It is merged with our life and we no longer distinguish too much between meditative states and other states. Everything is meditation, nothing is meditation...

In the interactional approach, in the confrontation of the meditator with his experience with the world, there again four stages are described (they are vaguely parallel to the internal stages).

First of all, we talk about ego meditation. This is the initial stage where one goes to meditation to relieve oneself of suffering and where one expects positive effects from meditation. It is also during this stage that we go on the “master hunt,” whether it is a physical master or through books. It is also at this stage that one speaks (a little too much) of one's practice and becomes a proselytizer. Stage again where one tries to live group experiences, where one goes in search of spiritual exoticism on the other side of the



world, where one enters into special ways of life (food, clothing, dating, etc.).

Then, we move on to the stage of the deconstruction of the ego. This long step, which often takes a lifetime, is no longer a joke. The honeymoon phase with meditation is over. We have passed the period of positive effects and we are entering that of boredom, questioning, doubts. This is the stage where all the little ego games from the first stage are gradually being dismantled. We sometimes behave in such a stupid way that we no longer dare to say that we are meditating or that meditation has positive effects. We realize that this stay in an Indian ashram, ultimately, did not change much. We realize the dependence on others, on groups, on the master and that there is something childish in these dependencies. Our neuroses resurface and internal conflicts appear. For example, how to reconcile meditation and sexuality? Meditation and love addiction? This is the stage of imposture: we have the impression that meditation does not bring anything in particular and we feel cheated. Some drop everything at this point. But they can resume later.

Because, with a little luck and perseverance, one day comes the stage that will propel us beyond the ego. Generally, towards the end of life, after having meditated for a long time, after having lived many human experiences, one can begin to recognize and appreciate the famous “benefits” announced at the very beginning, at the first stage. The ego is well deconstructed, we are no longer in the attachments of dependence, we experience subtle, but no less intense emotions of universal love. Meditative practice is integrated, even invisible, in our life. A certain wisdom specific to old age is mixed with that given by meditation and we are well aware of the little stratagems of the ego. We are in modest, discreet meditation. We are meditation.

Finally, Buddhism speaks to us of “Enlightenment.” A step that, modestly, I will call “theoretical,” because one can wonder if it would not be the last trap set by the ego. This is

the stage of legends, the stage of the ultimate ideal. In any case, this is the stage where the person is supposed to embody the perfect detachment from the world, while being totally immersed in the world. Live in full consciousness, but also in full vacuity... at the same time!

**COR:** I think more and more that meditation is not a long peaceful river. At the beginning one has the impression of “benefits” produced by the practice. It may be true. But it may also be a suggestion or placebo effect. We are always told all the positive things about meditating, so we end up believing it. But it doesn’t last. There is always a moment when we are “caught up” by something negative, which can end up consuming us up and there, meditation, appears to us to be of no help. How to do?

**SL:** Indeed, we often talk about the benefits of meditation and all its positive contributions for the practitioner. But there are also people who, at certain stages of the journey, have great difficulty in continuing to practice and who find the practice painful, distressing and, in a word, negative.

It is that meditation must be seen, not over the short or medium term, but over the course of a lifetime. It is therefore a “river,” but not always very calm! If you start meditating at twenty, you have thousands of potential meditations ahead of you, until the great departure. Also, going through phases, of a few days, weeks, months, even years, where you stop, because things are not going well, is not so important. It’s like that!

Moreover, there is not only formal meditation (sitting, eyes closed, silence, breath...). There are multiple approaches, in action, or based on other more helpful, more accompanying supports, such as walking, chanting mantras, music, guided meditations... So beyond formal meditation.

In the beginning of the practice, we can sometimes encounter two negative effects related to meditation. First of

all, the impossibility or the very great reluctance to meditate formally. The feeling that sitting down, closing your eyes and going into meditation will confront you with so much inner turmoil that it creates a blockage, based on anxiety or loss of motivation or both. In these periods, you are advised to practice other forms of meditation, in particular by chanting mantras (you can easily find some on YouTube) or by walking and talking aloud (far from indiscreet ears, it goes without saying). Through speech, it is a question of distracting the mind from its torments by inventing various stories, encounters with imaginary characters...

The second phenomenon is a side effect of formal, yet pleasant and seemingly normal meditations. Except that, shortly after, in the day, one can feel particularly angry and want to break things, if not worse... This happens when formal meditations awaken and untie some unconscious knots, releasing negative things, often repressed. It is then possible to take a meditative pause (stop for a while), or to switch for a while to non-formal forms of meditation in action.

In conclusion, if you happen to experience such phases during your meditative journey, don't panic! Do not insist, take a break or change technique. And don't worry, it will pass and you can resume good formal meditations afterwards.

**COR:** Is meditation about following rules?

**SL:** The (non-) purpose of all meditation is the state of Enlightenment, which is not conditioned by anything, which does not depend on anything and is outside the chain of causalities. Because, if the Enlightenment was dependent on causes, conditioned to something, then it would not be the Enlightenment, because what would have produced it could make it disappear by disappearing itself. It is therefore useless to "seek Enlightenment," because it is already there. It is compared to the sun behind the clouds: the sun is always

there, behind the clouds, simply, at a given moment, the clouds go away and the sun appears.

Enlightenment is not conditioned by anything, so there is no rule (method) that would lead to Enlightenment. When you are told to sit this way or that way, pay attention to the breath and all the rest, don't take these rules as the *nec plus ultra* in meditation, because they are just starting instructions for the beginner. One day you will drop them. Think back to your first driving lesson. Ignition, starting, handbrake, indicator, rear mirror, engage gently and look ahead! And today, what are you doing? No doubt all that, but without having the impression of respecting any rule. Everything is automated for you and you become one with driving.

That's for the internal rules for the practice of meditation. But what about external rules? The lifestyles that some seek to impose on themselves. Well! It's worse! If the Enlightenment does not depend on any (internal) rule of practice, it does not depend even less on any external rule, like way of life. Enlightenment is not conditioned, so it is not dependent on being a Buddhist, vegetarian, religious, atheist, whether one sleeps in the east, or in the west, whether one is alone or in a couple, rich or poor, peaceful or angry, violent or non-violent, etc. Enlightenment has absolutely nothing to do with anything. Once you understand this trick, you will begin to see what the word "freedom" means and, as the *Prajñāpāramitā* aptly puts it: "There is no Path, there is no Wisdom, nothing to reach or not to reach and by going well beyond the doctrines, this is how one arrives at Nirvāṇa!"<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> The *Prajñāpāramitā* is a collection of texts from Mahayana Buddhism concerning the perfection of transcendent wisdom. Scarlet's Lama quote comes from the Heart Sutra, which contains the heart of the *Prajñāpāramitā* teaching and deals with the vacuity of all things and phenomena.

**COR:** Ultimately, I wonder, what is meditation for?

**SL:** Very good question. Because it is a fundamental question, it is the mother of all questions. What is meditation good for?

To be able to answer it, I think it is important to specify what meditation is not for. Because it's the simplest, so that's where you should start. In the West, we know meditation as the provider of a whole host of benefits. Fight against stress, relax, have more memory, more intelligence, more openness, more empathy, more benevolence, more happiness... more, more, more... It's like an ad in the TV!

Seen from this angle, meditation is just a little game of the ego. Because, in the last resort, meditation is useless! It brings nothing and will not transform you into a Buddha. In fact, to be clearer, these “more, more, more”, are only the effect of the contrast linked to the passage of this time during which one was not meditating and this time when one begins to meditate. This is the “honeymoon” effect with meditation.

In the beginning, during the first weeks, the first months, perhaps, this simple change in lifestyle brings about a kind of more or less positive side effects. It is not the function, objective, or purpose of meditation to produce such materialistic side effects in particular, and it would be (it is!) a mistake to see meditation only as such and cling to it. Meditation is something else!

Does meditation serve as a form of spiritual “communication” by including in it all the religious, para-religious, mystical aspects? Like meditation on a figure of the Buddha, on any deity, the practice of visualizations, for example. No way. This kind of meditation is only the “spiritual materialism” version of the materialistic meditation mentioned at the beginning. Meditation doesn't do that either.

But what is meditation good for? In a first approach, it must be said, clearly, at the risk of shocking, but meditation, I repeat, it is useless! In any case, it is useless from a

materialist and spiritual materialist point of view. However, you have to meditate! But it's useless. But it must be done. But it's useless, but it must be done...

Meditation has no purpose. Because, from the moment meditation had a purpose, it would necessarily be an enterprise of the ego. Meditation leads beyond the ego, to *Nirvāṇa* (beware, this is not a purpose!), so it is advisable to meditate without a goal, without looking for what the meditation could be used for. We meditate for nothing. But we meditate. It is a totally free non-activity, without motivation. And, in such a context of teleological stripping, the question "what is the use of meditation?" is a vain question, without any relevance and which does not have any more place to be.

In fact, meditation serves to go from *Saṃsāra* to *Nirvāṇa*. While knowing that *Saṃsāra* and *Nirvāṇa* is the same thing. In more formal language, meditation is about getting from A to B, knowing that A = B. So meditating is useless. It is going from A to A or from B to B. One can still say that *Nirvāṇa* is a-conceptual, unthinkable, but still that it is uncreated, unproduced, already there, and that it will be always there, because out of time and not depending on any condition, any cause. Also, the very concept of "wanting to reach" *Nirvāṇa* is totally aberrant and contradictory.

There is nothing to reach or not reach. And yet, we are there to go from A to B, from *Saṃsāra* to *Nirvāṇa*. Which is not contradictory, if we consider that meditation is aimless and serves no purpose. But then, *exit* the question "what is meditation for?" and appears another question, much more interesting: "why should we meditate?"

If you are told that meditating is to go from *Saṃsāra* to *Nirvāṇa*, then adding that *Saṃsāra* and *Nirvāṇa* is the same thing, you might ask if continuing to meditate has any use. Thus, the answer to this question cannot be an answer in terms of the path to be traveled and the goal to be reached, all things which are a matter of ego. This is not meditation.

So: “Why should we meditate?” The answer, you will see, is extraordinary, in the full sense of the word. Think about this: you are in the saṃsāric magma. With all the jumble of sensations, perceptions, reactions, chain reactions, emotions, conceptions, theories, beliefs, ego consciousness. You are fully and permanently, throughout your life, in such a magma. And, the extraordinary thing that the message of meditation – which is useless – announces to you is that this “meditation which is useless” represents, in fact, a tiny window, a very small opening, in this saṃsāric magma.

We could take the image of a very small patch of blue sky in a vast sky of storm clouds. The kind of injunction, “we must meditate,” comes only from this: to create a small patch of blue sky regularly, every day. Because, either one remains trapped one hundred percent, forever, in the magma, or one makes the choice to take a look through this very small opening of one percent that meditation provides. And, it must be understood, this very small opening (which could grow in the long run) is not a goal! It is of no use from a saṃsāric point of view. The blue sky is already there, above the clouds, as thick as they can be. So from the point of view of the clouds, from the saṃsāric point of view, this little window is useless. It is, in a way, a symbol, the one that signifies that one can get out of the saṃsāric trap and rejoin what is, which, in any case, is already there: the blue sky.

In this sense, meditation is more about dissolving the clouds than gaining a patch of blue sky. But, you understand well that “dissolving the clouds” cannot be done from the point of view of the clouds. Otherwise, meditation is itself part of the *Saṃsāra*, as in spiritual materialism.

Thus, the injunction “it is necessary to meditate” is not of a functional, or moral, or spiritual nature. It is a symbolic “it is necessary,” which speaks of your recognition of the saṃsāric magma as the origin of suffering and confusion. And that you can do whatever you want within the saṃsāric magma, you will never get out of it! And it is by perceiving with force

this “never,” this “you will never get out of it!,” this absolute suffering, *Duḥkha*, that you will become aware of all the importance of favoring, every day, this tiny pixel of blue sky, just like that, for nothing! Free! Because this small opening is the only way out of the *Saṃsāra*. But, without that being a purpose!

In meditation, there is to develop this kind of gratuitousness, of innocence, one could almost say of “purity” of intentions. Or non-intention one could say again. If meditation, for you, is creating a cloud of intention every day, then you will remain in *Saṃsāra* and your meditation will simply be saṃsāric like all the rest of the saṃsāric magma. You might even feel like you are opening doors at times with this kind of saṃsāric meditation. But, unfortunately, behind every door you will still find a wall and other doors and it will never end.

The “we must” meditate, does not mean that we set a goal. It is a “must” of fundamental health. Like an acceptance, an abandonment, a letting go. There is an opening that is produced, through practice, but ultimately that opening is yourself. You totally identify with the opening. You are thus your own goal, so ultimately there is no goal...

**COR:** What is yoga and meditation really good for, when they are asked to be practiced without pursuing a goal?

**SL:** Yoga and meditation only prepare the brain, and therefore the intellect, to discern ultimate reality.

There is *hardware* and *software*. The *hardware* is the body and the brain. We never reach enlightenment from the only work on the body and the brain. At most one can reach forms of ecstasy, which are only the result of discharges of cerebral endorphins and phenomenally illusory. This is not enlightenment, *Nirvāṇa*. The work on the *hardware* is intended, in fact, to optimize the *software*, that is to say the intellect, the intelligence, the analytical and discriminating



thought, then the intuitive thought, this in order to achieve the right vision. It is the right vision that leads to experiencing the ultimate reality, which is true *Nirvāṇa*.

**COR:** I don't know if I practice meditation or not! On the other hand, I notice a reduction in my stress, when I walk in nature or when I isolate myself voluntarily to be calm. Is this the "right" technique?

**SL:** Meditation, characterized by a particular "technique," is only a concept of the ego. The ego needs to circumscribe what it does, to give it value, to characterize it and to value it in order to value itself. At the start, it is therefore the ego which meditates and which apes spirituality.

Thereafter, the ego fades and the technique dissolves. In fact, meditation does not exist, in the sense of doing something special. Meditation and action are one and the same and it is therefore normal for you to meditate without knowing it, as Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* was surprised to speak in prose without knowing it. In the end, meditation is life and life is meditation.

**COR:** Hello, as a Lama, a Buddhist monk, what do you prefer in meditation? Observe feelings? The emotions? Thoughts? Focus on one of the senses? I like to direct my attention to sounds. And you?

**THE :** *Śūnyatisūnya* !<sup>43</sup>

**COR:** Does meditation help with depression?

**SL:** Meditation can actually help. Depression, like all mental illnesses, is multifactorial. There is a neuro dimension and a psychological dimension, to put it simply. On both levels,

---

<sup>43</sup> *Śūnyatisūnya*, means the vacuity of vacuity. Scarlet Lama is therefore referring here to a practice of meditation without support, on the Voidness.

meditation works. It rebalances the central nervous system, our brain, and it also acts to let go of depressogenic thoughts or thoughts that maintain depression. In general, this can be enough to get out of this disorder <sup>44</sup>.

**COR:** I am very bothered by the thoughts that continually appear during my meditations. What to do to stop them?

**SL:** Don't panic! This experience of thoughts during meditation is meditation itself. Meditation does not consist in wanting to "empty one's mind" and the "emptiness" (we should rather say vacuity) is not emptiness. As it is said in the teachings: emptiness is form and form is emptiness. Or, in the case of thoughts: emptiness is thoughts and thoughts are emptiness. What does that mean?

In fact, the thoughts are the expression of the ego, but the effort to "empty one's mind (of thoughts)" and before that, the guilt or other irritation because of the presence of the thoughts, well, it is still ego! So, in struggling like this, you don't get out of it.

Vacuity properly understood is inner detachment, inner space, inner letting go of thoughts (as well as external stimuli, like the neighbor's dog barking). So it doesn't really matter whether the thoughts go on their rounds, they are part of what is, and that's all. Empty one's mind in the sense of stopping thoughts is a dualistic view of meditation. In the unified, undifferentiated view, we see beyond...

---

<sup>44</sup> Although this message from Scarlet Lama contradicts other messages where he explains that meditation is useless, we decided to keep it, because the contradiction is only apparent. At the beginning of meditative practice, meditation can be "used" for something, it has its own neurobiological and psychological effects on the health of the person. But, later on, for the advanced meditator, that's when meditation is useless. Meditation is then practiced without the pursuit of a goal.

Accept the thoughts for what they are. Do not forget either that meditation leads to intuitive and creative thinking and that it helps us in this to allow solutions to our difficulties to emerge, to change our destiny. What will happen over the course of the practice is: we are seated at the edge of the river and we watch the thoughts flow (but we are no longer in the river). The thoughts are still there, but there is already no actor of the thoughts, just an observer. And then, at certain moments, the observer and the thoughts can disappear... But you understand well that it cannot be the result of the action and the will of the ego. Enlightenment is a being-there of non-action, of non-will.

In addition to this metaphor of the river, in Buddhism there is another interesting, but little known image that can help you, it is that of the *Bardo*. We know the *Bardo* in the West with the *Bardo-Thödol*, the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Or you may have heard of the teaching of the six *bardos*. In fact, *Bardo* means the mental state. And *Bardo* is composed of “bar” and “do<sup>45</sup>.” *Bar* can be seen as a wide river, a river or even a huge lake or an ocean. The *bar* is a vast moving expanse, without borders. You can’t see the edges. The *bar* is therefore the mind in its natural state. It is the rested mind, when you let go during meditation. It is a huge, immense stuff, which flows in an imperceptible way, which is without limits. And then there’s the *do*. It represents a relief, an island, more or less important, in the middle of the *bar*. The *do* is the centering, the preoccupation of the mind. When you say “I have thoughts” while meditating, you are saying that there is the *bar* of your mind, but in the middle there is this prominence of your thoughts.

You can have a big *do*, a huge *do*, with a true mountain of thoughts, concerns, fantasies, continually emerging, and very little *bar* around it. But, conversely, you could very well

---

<sup>45</sup> Pronounce “do” like “go” (not “doo”).

experience a very small *do*, in the middle of a huge *bar*, spread from horizon to horizon.

If you take a little interest in this notion of *bar-do*, you will see that your perception of your mind during meditation (and even outside of meditation!) will change. You will no longer say to yourself with irritation: “Ah! I still have parasitic thoughts that pollute my meditation!” You will simply observe what the state of your *bar* is, in relation to your *do*. You will see that, day after day, even moment by moment, *bar* and *do* evolve, their proportions change. So, this will allow you to put things into perspective and not give in to the “I have too many thoughts” panic.

**COR:** How do you become enlighten, be an Enlighten?

**SL:** Allow me to answer you with this little Buddhist story. One day a disciple came to see his master.

– **Disciple:** Master, what is the best way to meditate? Is it meditation on the mantra? On the breath? On the heart ? On the mandala? On...

– **Master (interrupting):** Nothing! Meditation is doing nothing.

– **Disciple (perplexed):** Well, okay. But what does meditation do? I am told that it allows you to relax, that it improves sleep, the state of health, that it allows you to better manage relationships, that you can reach *Nirvāṇa*...

– **Master (interrupting):** Nothing! Meditation doesn't do anything.

– **Disciple (increasingly disturbed):** Well, okay. But if meditation is doing nothing and it doesn't do anything, what is the point of meditating? Why meditate?

– **Master:** Do you ever do nothing?

– **Disciple (thinking for a moment):** Uh, no. Honestly, I'm always doing something, and even when I'm sleeping, I sometimes fidget and dream.

– **Master:** Do you ever not want to get anything?

– **Disciple (thinking for a moment):** Uh, no. Honestly, all I do is get something, all the time.

– **Master:** O zealous disciple, do you understand that this thing called “meditation,” which consists in doing nothing in order to get nothing, is the most precious, the most sublime, the most formidable and the most revolutionary in the universe?!

It was then that the disciple was enlightened...

**COR:** Is meditation about focusing? For example, on the breath? Because I have a hard time staying focused, on the breath or anything.

**SL:** The term “focus,” which is often encountered in books on meditation, and which you use (“to focus”), always seems inappropriate to me and can mislead, especially beginners. Concentration carries the idea of an effort. It is better, in my opinion, to use the word “condensation” of the mind on something, which suggests this effortless resting of the mind without focusing on the object of meditation.

This misconception can persist even in experienced meditators, who believe they can “deepen” their meditation by “focusing” on a single stimulus. In fact, it is quite the opposite that occurs, because the more one advances in the meditation, the more the stimulus fades and disappears. The ultimate “technique” being the non-technique or meditation on the Voidness. There we begin to understand and experience what “condensation” really is.

**COR:** I have often practiced meditation, but always in teaching, internship and training contexts. Alone at home, I never “succeeded” in starting a process. But I plan to do another training this year. What else can I do?

**SL:** For many beginners, a few barriers prevent the practice of meditation. Primarily the inability to incorporate the

practice into the daily schedule. And, in two, the anguish to approach the practice alone.

The solutions that these people find are registration in a group of meditators (often with payment), which “forces” the person to practice, to give time for the practice. It’s a bit like, “I paid for the swimming pool, so I have to go!” And in two, the fact of being in a group reassures and drives away the anxiety to approach this practice, while creating a collective emulation.

Sometimes there is a third reason for this difficulty in engaging in meditation. Engage in something as simple and small as sitting down and doing nothing (or almost nothing). These people first need to strengthen their ego. They do this by looking for a “master,” a guru and a “teaching,” a kind of official reference, whereas a simple book is enough!

**COR:** What is the best posture for meditation?

**SL:** Meditation doesn’t have to be linked to this or that posture. The posture is often the sham! One can even meditate in action (for example while walking or doing the dishes). Also, each one chooses his “posture” according to his bodily possibilities. But for those who are lucky enough to have an unscathed body, you should know that the “pains” at the beginning of the practice are normal. These are the “body barriers” (ah, because there are mental ones? you might say. Yes, and emotional barriers too...) of meditation.

These barriers will disappear, little by little, over the practices. Of course, everyone has their own barriers and they will therefore take more or less time to disappear.

Yoga or other physical exercises (walking, cycling, swimming, dancing, gymnastics, martial arts, etc.) can help break down these physical barriers.

**COR:** What is the best meditation technique: scan, focus, concentrate...?

**SL:** To answer you, a little dialogue between a disciple and his master.

– **Disciple:** Master, you told us that meditation is “doing nothing,” so why are we talking about “techniques,” like scanning your body, focusing your senses, concentrating on your breathing? I do not understand anything.

– **Master:** Are you capable of doing nothing, really?

– **Disciple:** No, or not very long. Ten seconds, rather five, on the best days.

– **Master:** As, at the beginning, “doing nothing” is the most difficult thing there is, so you are told to do “almost nothing,” this is the “technique” of meditation. And, much later, after years of practice, you will abandon the “technique” (or rather it is the technique that will abandon you) when you have reached the real “doing nothing.”

– **Disciple:** Okay. So all the discussions to know which is the best technique are in vain?

– **Master:** Well said. What is the best technique? This is the one that suits you!

I would add that action verbs like “scan,” “focus,” “concentrate,” etc. lead, in my opinion, to a distorted vision of meditation, based on a pragmatism of doing.

Meditation is first of all an abandonment and a letting go. The basic techniques must be plugged into non-effort, non-focus. In my own way of teaching meditation, I speak more of “condensation,” rather than focus. Water condensing on cold glass is a great metaphor for this. The steam makes no effort, it hits the cold glass and condenses, as if in spite of itself. Physicists will also tell us “that it gives up its caloric energy to the glass,” an energy abandonment which makes this metaphor even more telling!

**COR:** I would like to start meditation, but I don’t know where to start. What do you recommend for me to start?

**SL:** Only one solution: sit quietly somewhere and... DON'T START!

**COR:** We cannot think less and less or not think at all. We can, however, listen to thoughts and accept them for what they are, without judgment. This is what is taught. Can't we really stop the mental flow?

**SL:** Of course it is! It is possible to think less and less and even, sometimes, not at all. However, this is not possible from a will, from a desire to stop thinking or to think less and less. It happens as an unintended side effect of deep meditative practice.

Suddenly, the mental condensation is intense and everything stops for a few moments. But, once again, it is useless to seek this state, because the will prevents reaching it.

**COR:** I would like to come back to the phenomenon of intrusive thoughts. A lot of people, with whom I discuss meditation, are confronted with it. Is there a form of meditation to be able to fight against these intrusive thoughts? I've heard of meditation on the Voidness. Is this a worthwhile approach to this problem?

**SL:** Meditation on the Voidness is the ultimate way of meditation, when you go beyond all techniques. However, meditation on Voidness, although it has some advanced techniques, is not in itself a technique, rather it is a "non-technique." It is the most successful, the purest "doing nothing." All of this is obviously aimed at very advanced practitioners, who have meditated for decades.

As far as parasitic thoughts are concerned, they are normal, especially in beginners. They can come back in more advanced meditators in case of stress, difficulties during the day. The attitude that one must have vis-à-vis these thoughts is the classic attitude that one recommends in meditation:



not to push them away, not to try to stop them, but don't interest either, nor yet take pleasure in them. When you perceive them, return simply and tirelessly to the support of the practice (the breath, the point of consciousness, the sound, depending on what you have chosen), without effort and without focus, and without feeling guilty!

By practicing in this way, the thoughts will not disappear, but there will gradually be an inner space between the conscious center and these thoughts. We will be (this is a metaphor) like sitting on the edge of a mental river, watching our thoughts flow. Meditation is non-effort and non-struggle, for effort and struggle sustain the thoughts.

**COR:** I've been practicing guided meditation for over a year with a smartphone app. During this year of meditation, fifteen minutes a day, I had three very intense spiritual experiences.

The first, I opened four of my chakras, I saw their colors, I felt and saw, too, all these forces springing from the top of my skull to go straight towards the universe.

The second experience, I saw myself outside of my body.

Finally, during the third experience, I was aware of my unconscious. That is to say, I was like the spectator of everything my unconscious was doing. So I remember everything down to the smallest detail. During this meditation, a female soul "communicated" with me.

It's three intense experiences that happened on three different days, but each time with similarities. For each of these days, I had experienced a very strong emotional charge (positive or negative), linked and related to animals (dogs and horses). I meditated in the evening when I came home and that's when I was able to have these experiences.

Honestly, these are magical experiences to live. They are intense and also difficult to explain and translate into words... I wish everyone to be able to experience them.

Of course, such experiences raise a lot of questions in me. After several researches and exchanges, I realized that these experiences, as intense as they are, were also an open door for “malicious” souls.

Also, my question is: could you or someone competent that you could recommend me, inform me and/or help me to:

- understand the meaning of such experiences;
- know and mentally strengthen my “defenses” against possible attacks from malicious souls;
- allow me to better understand the opening of the chakras in order to better control the process of opening and closing.

Thank you for your kindness and your non-judgment.

**SL:** I'll answer you frankly: you have to stop this kind of practice, based on suggestions. You describe experiences that usually occur in very experienced practitioners, using very advanced techniques.

The fact that you manage to have such experiences after a year of guided meditations worries me a great deal. I am afraid that you are confronted with a mental fragility of which you were not fully aware until now.

In any case, you must know that everything you describe there is just a creation of your own mind and it is totally illusory.

Instead, turn to meditation techniques without external support. A simple and very healthy technique is meditation on the breath. Being aware of the breath coming in and going out and that's it. When you realize that you have gone elsewhere, return to the breath tirelessly, without effort and without focus. And that's all. Do this once or twice a day for twenty minutes and it will be enough. Gently push away all these “delusions,” which are only dangerous illusions, if you start to believe in them.

**COR:** I understand when you say that these are only mental creations. But how to be sure? I also meditate on the chakras and I could also tell you with certainty that their feeling is not illusory. In any case, in my life, I don't have the impression of having a "mental fragility?"

**SL:** I answered you with reference to the pure Buddhist teachings on vacuity, as I received them. For these teachings, all phenomena (including mental phenomena) come under *Māyā*<sup>46</sup>, the world of illusion. It is therefore a wrong way to believe and cling to the appearance of these psychic phenomena.

For example, in the Tibetan Book of the Dead or in other treatises on meditative practice, it is said that visualization work on deities is, first, metaphorical and, second, that it is only a stage in spiritual evolution. A stage not without danger, especially if one lingers there. A stage that we must go beyond. But, that's up to you!

---

<sup>46</sup> *Māyā* is defined as the absence of proper nature of phenomena and therefore their illusory and unreal character.



## BUDDHISM IN PRACTICE

**COR:** If I meditate, will I have to change my lifestyle, my diet, stop drinking alcohol and smoking, etc.?

**SL:** Ah, damn it, I'm going to have to change?! What?! If I meditate, will I have to give up McDonalds and cigarette?! As the Tibetan teachings say: "If you haven't embarked on the spiritual path, don't go! But if you have taken a single step on the spiritual path, go all the way!" You will have been warned: be careful, meditation can be good for your health! (and bad for the ego).

**COR:** If we defend the idea of unconditional love and refuse all forms of violence, I would like to know how to act in extreme cases. I am thinking of terrorism, for example.

**SL:** In Buddhist teaching, "non-violence" is often misunderstood and reduced to passivity. Already, well before Buddhism, in India, this reflection existed. In the *Bhagavad-Gita*<sup>47</sup> is presented a dialogue between a noble warrior, who must fight and probably kill members of his extended family with whom he is in conflict, and... God himself. The warrior has scruples, he wants to be "non-violent," but it is the divinity who enjoins him to fight, because he must do so

---

<sup>47</sup> The *Bhagavad-Gita* is one of the fundamental writings of Hinduism, often considered as a compendium of all Vedic doctrine.

“without waiting for the fruit of his actions,” in detachment, it is the path.

In fact, the path of meditation is not becoming a vegetable, it's just doing what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, without waiting for the result of this action. There is a dish to do, I do the dishes; there is a terrorist in the train who threatens or attacks people, I use violence against this person to protect human lives.

We find this idea of “non-violence” in the philosophy of martial arts: the fight must be done with an empty and liberated mind.

The notion of karma is itself misunderstood. It is generally seen as an equivalent of the “sin” of monotheistic religions, but it is not that at all. What is called karma is the personal repercussion of our actions. This must be seen in correspondence with the very process of meditation and the journey on the Path.

Some of our acts are hindrances to the journey, to meditation, that is karma. There is therefore a link between sitting meditation and meditation in action. Killing someone in self-defense without inner detachment may lead to “bad” karma. Killing likewise, but with inner detachment, will have no karmic repercussions.

Never forget the spiritual “Sirius point of view<sup>48</sup>.” we are only a tiny grain of will in the infinite universe of wills and our actions are insignificant in the face of this universe. What really matters is the very process of liberation.

---

<sup>48</sup> Seeing the world “from the Sirius point of view” is a metaphorical expression of Voltaire in his philosophical tale *Micromégas*, which features an extraterrestrial inhabitant of the star Sirius. The expression means to see things from very high up, with a lot of hindsight and detachment.

**COR:** I am using a smartphone app that vibrates in my pocket every fifteen minutes to help me maintain my focus throughout the day. What do you think?

**SL:** Meditation is a natural and gradual process that doesn't have to be forced. So why this desire to "maintain your focus throughout the day"? Isn't that the imperious expression of your ego?

The path, spiritual and psychological, linked to meditative practice, works quite differently. It is a long work of wear and tear on the ego. One finds in the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism the metaphor of the ego compared to an old shoe that one wears out on the path while traversing it. Wanting to use technical devices, things of the order of will, of effort, is useless and, in fact, only strengthens the ego a little more.

The interior space IS ALREADY THERE! In you. Also, looking for it is completely illusory and can only lead you away from it.

Enlightenment, the teachings say again, is like the sun hidden behind the clouds. The sun is always there, it is simply the clouds of the ego that hide it. Enlightenment is a surrender, an acceptance of what is, not a search for perfection.

The first thing to overcome in the meditative process is the pursuit of a goal, a result, because all of this belongs to the ego and must be let go. This detachment (or whatever name you give it) can only happen despite you, despite your ego. It will be the result of years of daily practice.

Do not confuse technique with meditation. The technique (the practice of mindfulness) is a tool. Meditation is a state. One day we abandon the technique. Only the state remains.

**COR:** When I started meditating, I did like everyone else: breathe, relax, pose... sitting or lying down. Sometimes I felt great feelings of letting go, but I felt that this feeling could be amplified. So I continued the practice using, at times, guided

meditations, to see how far it could go. I have two questions for you.

When we look for “guided meditations” on the internet, we quickly come across videos to communicate with spiritual guides, with our inner self, some even offer astral travel! I don’t really know what to think of these “techniques.” What do you think?

I have experienced such approaches several times, but each time I was afraid of going too far in the “trip.” So I stop everything. I open my eyes, take off my headphones, check to see if my heart is still beating. It reassures me to pass my hands over my face, to give myself a slap to remind myself that I am here. But on the other hand, this slight fear prevents me from completing the exercise. I have such the impression that a universe opens wide in front of me, but that I don’t have the audacity to take the plunge. The problem is that I really feel like my heart stops beating and accepting this feeling seems far from easy. Do you think I have to overcome this fear in order to be able to continue these practices?

**SL:** I know these “guided meditations” well, having explored them. My findings are that these experiences are only meditation in name. Basically it is hypnosis, with a series of suggestions. The initial suggestion of something initially protective (like visualizing a circle of light, a guardian angel, etc.) reminds me of circles of protection with protective deities in Tibetan mysticism. But whether they are suggestions or autosuggestions, all of these are ultimately only a product of the person’s own mind and are therefore totally illusory.

It may not be a question of saying for or against, but of asking whether hypnosis or self-hypnosis is in the spirit of the meditative approach. Meditation is indeed part of a completely different paradigm, that of mental stripping. Which is the opposite of the approach of “guided meditations” which strive to infuse the mind with images



and sensations to build an illusory world for it. All manifestations of the mind in meditation are illusions (this is also called the “way of error”).

I offer you, to conclude, the best known sentences of the *Prajñāpāramitā*<sup>49</sup>, in the sutra of the heart, in order to grasp, perhaps, the path of vacuity:

“The Five Aggregates are to be comprehended as being naturally and wholly Voidness.

“Forms are Voidness and Voidness is Forms; nor are Forms and Voidness separable, or Forms other than Voidness.

“In the same way, Perception, Feeling, Volition, and Consciousness are Voidness.

“Thus, Śāriputra, are all things Voidness, without characteristics, Unborn, Unimpeded, Unsullied, Unsulliable, Unsubtracted, Unfilled.

“Śāriputra, such being so, Voidness hath no form, no perception, no feeling, no volition, no consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind, no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no quality.

“Where there is no eye there is no desire, and so on to, there is no consciousness of desire.

“There is no Ignorance; there is no overcoming of Ignorance; and so on to, there is no decay and no death, and to, there is no overcoming of decay and death.

“In the same way, there is no sorrow, there is no evil, there is no taking away, there is no Path, there is no Wisdom nor any attaining nor not-attaining.

“Śāriputra, such being so – for even the Bodhisattvas have nothing which is to be attained – by relying upon the *Prajñāpāramitā*, and abiding in it, there is no mental

---

<sup>49</sup> A text that can be found, for example, in Lama Kasi Dawa Samdup, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*. Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 356-358.

obscuration of the Truth and, therefore, no fear; and, passing far beyond erroneous paths or doctrines, one successfully attaineth *Nirvāṇa*.”

**COR:** I have been meditating for several months and I have gained in serenity, energy, etc. Yet I have a feeling of “flatness,” that my emotions are “smoothed out,” that there is nothing more to wait for... I almost regret the whims of my ego!

**SL:** This stage on the path of meditation is called the “vegetable stage” (some say the “jellyfish stage”). This is an interesting stage during which the ego, subjugated by the practice, plays at being its “serene little Buddha.” But reassure yourself and wait a while, you will end up finding beautiful and lively emotions, but this time, detached from the stakes of the ego.

**COR:** I have a lot of questions right now, including one specific question that keeps coming up. What do you think is the meaning of life?

**SL:** Life has no meaning, because everything is an illusion and only the ego seeks a “meaning in its life.” And it is useless to say to oneself that then there is nothing left but to commit suicide. Because suicide itself has no meaning, any more than death. Because nothing is born and nothing dies. So? Just do what needs to be done in the moment and every moment, without asking questions. Are you looking for the meaning of your life? Meditate!

**COR:** I’m going through a tough time at work right now and I’m overwhelmed with too much stress. I meditate every morning for thirty minutes. It calms me down at the moment. Then during the day I gradually lose this calm. How to stay in the present moment on a daily basis and thus avoid stress?

**SL:** The effects of meditation are not limited to the physiological, mental and emotional benefits. There are also effects related to the development of creative intelligence. It can change our lives profoundly through the development of inspiration, particular choices, appropriate decisions and opportunities seized at the right time.

This is to tell you that if you are attentive to certain new thoughts, which can emerge during meditation, this can guide you towards another situation, another job, less stressful, more pleasant. It is not a question of tackling everything overnight (although sometimes...), but of embarking on another path and building something else to change your life.

**COR:** Is it really necessary to find a master on the spiritual path? Or can we do without him and be satisfied with inspiring and informative books on spirituality and meditation? I'm a bit lost there.

**SL:** In the teachings it is clearly said that the true master is the situations of life. Human masters are only certain situations in life.

Going on a "master hunt" is not really advisable. It's a little game of the ego and which feeds the ego. Just meditate and let it come. You don't have to go find a master, but the master will come to you.

It can take many forms (a man, a woman, a child, a place, a film, a book, a work of art, etc.) and the deeper you go into your meditation, the more you will encounter it.

**COR:** In forums or social media groups, I sometimes read posts that leave me perplexed. I'm really not an expert and I don't have any particular technique in the practice of meditation. Over the years, I have learned to adapt the practice to my reality, to my needs...

But, to read certain messages, it is as if one were looking for a magic formula to settle everything. I don't believe that it is likely to happen. On the other hand, I see meditation as a good life habit to integrate. And over time, training, we develop our abilities, which inevitably influences our life choices and our ways of acting and reacting. There is no need to "levitate" or be a "guru." It is enough to find there well-being and pleasure in the practice. What do you think?

**SL:** I understand what you mean. We are in the West and Westerners have the unfortunate tendency to pragmatism and competition (just see how they have transformed the "spirit" of martial arts – with the exception of aikido).

I also notice the profusion of "techniques," which leads many people to flit from technique to technique and to make this fluttering a reason for self-valorization. One could speak, I believe, of the hunt for techniques.

And then also (this began in the 1970s with transcendental meditation), the search for scientific backing, with the "proofs" that meditation works, that it produces such and such effects. All of this distances us both from the spiritual purity of meditation (a single "technique" is good enough and the simplest is the best) and from its true goal, which is non-goal.

However, in all humility, everyone approaches meditation according to who they are, according to their own "karma" and this must be accepted as such.

**COR:** What is "love" spiritually and meditatively?

**SL:** I'll warn you right away: I'm not going to do poetry or romanticism. The feeling of love is generated, at the base, by an innate biological program, composed of both a bond of attachment (which is found in all higher animals) and an imaginary dimension specific to the human.

The proof of the existence of this genetically established program is that it appears one day (generally at puberty) and

fades or rather transforms, sublimates, during aging. There is therefore a link with the levels of certain hormones, the program being linked to sexuality, to ensure the reproduction of the species.

We can consider this program as a form of psychic “courtship,” which would have developed in human beings, by natural selection (the human beings who had the best program also had the best attachment, therefore a better survival of offspring).

In terms of the imagination, humans have developed a whole “culture” of love and numerous beliefs, as well as poetic, artistic, religious and mystical forms of expression. Love is thus the object of multiple beliefs and nourishes a mountain of works on its subject.

Love is also the object of many illusions and, throughout life, we often fail and deceive ourselves, thinking we love.

Love is, at its base, genetically, selfish, it develops around an instinctive impulse, an imaginary bond and mutual benefits. Basically, it is not unconditional.

However, in some human beings, love can evolve and transform and somehow sublimate the basic neurobiological program. It would be wrong to ignore the fact that we are basically a body and a brain.

An inner evolution (greatly helped by the practice of meditation) can emerge to approach the feeling of love on other more subtle, more absolute and more universal levels. From the point of view of “classic” love, this absolute love may seem cold, distanced, bizarre, abnormal. For those who experience it, it is a free, extremely powerful love, detached from earthly and human contingencies, which is directed towards people or entities, but without fixation by attachment. The reference of this love is unspeakable. Some say it’s God, but that’s just a figurative expression.

**COR:** How can I trust myself, trust life, trust each other? I know how to feel anger, love, respect, but how do you feel trust? How can meditation help me with this? And how can I meditate if I don't have confidence, if I can't let go?

**SL:** There are two ways to have confidence. The first way is evidence-based trust. I have evidence that shows that I can trust myself or the other. This trust is fragile, because it is subject to proof. This trust is a belief, which can easily turn into its opposite: loss of trust, non-trust.

There is another kind of trust. Because trust and distrust based on evidence are beliefs and there is something in us that maintains these beliefs. This something is beyond the search for evidence. This something is "trust," a trust without proof, an absolute, universal trust (which does not mean blind trust).

And how do you gain that kind of trust? Quite simply by learning to meditate, that is to say by learning to let go of the need for proofs (which are judgments), by letting the mind open to what is, by letting beliefs slide and dissolve. So, one day comes trust without proof, without condition, a bit like when we talk about the unconditional love of a parent, of a mother. To become for oneself one's own mother, such is the non-goal of all meditation.

**COR:** This may sound strange to you, but my practice of meditation, the study and application of Buddhist philosophy, and my new outlook on life, and life after life, take me away from my close circle. I am more and more alone and I find it very difficult to feel good with others. I can't stand their superficial conversations based solely on materialism. I feel inadequate in this world in which I find no place.

However, I continue to provide, both at work and with my children. Fortunately, I still manage to assume this, but until when? This is a question I ask myself.

**SL:** The spiritual path is a solitary path, even if we can share our journey with certain people. In fact, our paths are parallel and we know that the parallels do not touch, except at infinity...

It is therefore normal to feel lonely, already with “materialistic” people, as you say, but even sometimes also with others, “practitioners.” It is a reality that one learns to accept and, with the help of experience and age, the need for the other fades a lot. And then, let’s not forget, it is the ego that experiences a feeling of loneliness.

**COR:** Meditation is supposed to bring openness, letting go, acceptance. However, faced with certain difficulties that we encounter in life (for example, grieving, moral harassment at work, a fight with a neighbor, etc.) we often struggle to connect this meditative letting go and our problem in daily life.

Is it a question of time? How many years of meditative practice does it take to be able to benefit from it in life?

**SL:** Time... It’s also often the time necessary for problems to pass or resolve themselves, with or without meditation.

The practice of meditation and, above all, the study of Buddhist thought, lead to a form of detachment, which is called “*Tathatā*,” “that’s like it is.”

The “that’s like it is” is generally easy to understand in the here-and-now of meditative practice, of which it is the foundation: to be fully aware of what is happening here and now or “that’s like it is” here and now.

However, beyond that, the “that’s like it is” also applies to the past and the future. In the past, it is all that appears of regrets, guilt or pleasure, attached to the memories that appear in the mind. The “that’s like it is” applied to the past means that we accept these memories and therefore these mental formations for what they are, without maintaining them, without pushing them away either, “that’s like it is.”

For the future, we can have desires, ambitions, plans, projects and, there again, the “that’s like it is” consists in welcoming these imaginations without nurturing them or pushing them back either.

The “that’s like it is” is diffused not only in time, but also in the space of actions and situations. It is possible to meditate while walking or doing housework and here we find the notion of here and now.

However, the “that’s like it is” applies just as well and more broadly to situations and in particular to social situations. And, at this level, especially in the West, there is a great confusion with fatalism.

It is believed that practicing “that’s like it is” in social situations represents a kind of passive acceptance of what is. This is the case, for example, of non-violence, which some interpret as rigid passivity. But that’s not quite it...

Try hitting an aikido master a bit and once you’re lying on the ground you’ll understand the whole dynamic of “that’s like it is!” The purpose of meditation applied to everyday life is not to become slugs.

The “that’s like it is” in social situations appears more difficult to understand. It is indeed a mode of letting go, of openness, of acceptance, of the situation and in the situation. However, this in no way signifies a form of uniform passivity.

The “that’s like it is” is the quiet basis for the deployment of the action which must be required because it is necessary. If I see someone drowning or being assaulted, I’m not going to, under the pretext of “that’s like it is,” do nothing. We dive, in the water or on the aggressor, but in this state of mind of “that’s like it is” and it is in this that the action is right.

In some texts we also speak of related or derived notions, such as even mind or equanimity or “action without pursuing the fruit of this action” (see the Bhagavad-Gita, for example).



Faced with moral harassment at work, the reactions of the victim are very often a form of suffering, plaintive or mute passivity and a collapse into depression. The “that’s like it is” consists in meditating on this situation and managing to put it at a distance mentally.

From this situational “that’s like it is,” is not necessarily passivity and the abandonment of all initiative that must prevail. On the contrary, the person can then think more “intelligently” and find solutions and resources.

For example, there are legal weapons against bullying. You can start by keeping a diary of the facts and researching and using social media, ie talking about it around you, etc.

So we see that the “that’s like it is” applied to situations, especially social ones, is not passivity, but full action, in detachment.

And it is the same in a situation of loss of a person we love. Mourning confronts us with suffering, but also with regret, guilt or even anger. All this soil is a good fertilizer for practicing “that’s like it is” and, from there, moving from collapse to a creative dynamic of self-renewal. After all, isn’t continuing to live after the departure of a loved one the best way to pay homage to him/her?

**COR:** I read definitions of Buddhist notions, like impermanence and non-duality, that I feel like I understand without really understanding them. Could you illustrate this?

**SL:** Just for once, allow me to tell you about a very personal experience, which will perfectly illustrate the two notions of impermanence and non-duality that you are questioning.

I am lucky to live in the countryside, with fields and forests close by and even a hiking trail that passes in front of my door. Ideal place for solitary and meditative walks, in the middle of beautiful inspiring landscapes. I have known the

place for years. So I have a kind of inside story of this place, with lots of good memories.

For the past few weeks, as the weather has been too cold, I have wisely contented myself with staying caulked at home, waiting for spring to be more than just a date on the calendar. I took the opportunity to make plans and contact a craftsman for a rustic table which I have been planning for years. The craftsman in question turns out to be a retiree who continues to tinker to maintain his standard of living. He offers me a table project at a very affordable price. We get to know each other, he knows the village where I live. We are from neighboring villages and there are patches of pine trees on the side where I hike. I vaguely see where he means. Hey, by the way, he's having some cuts made there right now, because the trees are old, sick, etc. I don't get too much at the time...

The following days, the thermometer is in good shape, the wind has dropped a little and I take the opportunity to go for my walk. Descent through the field, ascent through the forest, go around the source, cross a small locality, the birds are singing, everything is perfect, what a pleasure! And suddenly (the noises of the tractor should have alerted me): horror! A real battlefield opens before me.

The hiking trail is strewn with branches, the pines on either side have all been felled. Of the pretty landscape, where at the height of summer there was a bit of shade and cicadas singing like on the Côte d'Azur, there is nothing left, everything has been totally destroyed. And I understand at the same time who is the "author" of this chainsaw carnage.

But, you see, no, I didn't explode with anger, because I was concentrating on stepping over all these branches, which formed like so many corpses on a battlefield. I couldn't pass, neither to the right nor to the left, and turning around is not my style, so I step over, at the risk of twisting my ankle or worse.

And I have this first lesson in mind, that of impermanence: everything changes, nothing is permanent, beings, things, landscapes. This change may be the product of human action, as in this case, but I have also experienced similar changes under the action of the forces of Nature, for example, a beautiful forest destroyed as a result of the passage of a winter storm.

And then, having left the place, having recovered a little peace, another lesson appeared to me, non-duality: is this guy (the craftsman, owner of his forest and author of the massacre) a “bastard” for destroying my paradise? And, at the same time, he would also be a nice guy, because he’s going to make me a nice table at a low price? Who is he then? He is neither one nor the other, or both at the same time, that is to say, neither one nor the other, that is what I was saying. And, therefore, the situation itself is neither good nor bad, that’s like it is!

In the evening, I thought about it again and my ego found a good scheme, except that it will take a little time: for three or four years I will not go back to this place at all. Nature will reconstitute itself, a new landscape will emerge. And, in three or four years, I will have the great pleasure of exploring and marveling again, like the first time...

**COR:** Thank you very much for this personal example. I am very honored. For impermanence, it is ultimately not the most difficult to understand. On the other hand, non-duality is more subtle... It reminds me of the attitude one should have towards a murderer or a rapist. Our immediate reaction is to put the person in a black box: he’s a bad guy, to be eliminated! While justice asks us to be more neutral and examine the why, etc. How can we overcome our “immediate reactions?” The duality is so obvious to us that it is very difficult to get rid of it.

**SL:** The duality is “so obvious to us,” you say, it’s a mental reflex to place a murderer on the dark side. So you separate

things, the good on one side and the bad on the other. Such is the duality. This duality applies to all things. Here we are talking about a human being in negative, but the duality can also concern a human being in positive. For example, a holy man or a great master of meditation. Are they really and entirely in the white box? Aren't they first and foremost human, with their weaknesses, their faults, their imperfections? Let me tell you this Buddhist story.

One day, a great meditation master, of the Tibetan lama type, invited his students, of the Western type, to follow him for a meditative walk. The master preceded them with a good step, apparently perfectly concentrated on his walk, in a state of deep meditation.

The students were very impressed and tried to follow him on this path of mindfulness. When suddenly the great meditating master, of the Tibetan lama type, let out a long fart, loud and without any ambiguity... This is how a simple fart can break duality and lead to non-duality.

Duality is what is carried by judgments. All judgments, directly or impliedly, affirm a duality. And, of course, non-duality is about slicing through the two opposing elements of the duality of judgment. If I say: "what we ate for lunch was disgusting," it is a judgment based on the duality between what is good (implied) and what is "disgusting." To defend this duality consists in saying (and especially in thinking) that: "good" or "not good (disgusting)" depends on the taste of each one and many other causes. And so, there is no such thing as a "good" or "not good" thing in absolute terms.

To return to our Buddhist history, the duality would be to say: "it is indecent to fart in public," which implies the categories of decent and indecent (decent not to fart, indecent to do so). Now, these categories are relative and not absolute social "tastes." There are human communities in which farting, burping, is not only decent, but is also marked by an opposite duality to ours: "it would be impolite not to fart/burp at the table." We can clearly see that duality is a

social construct, a representation of the dualistic world, in white or black.

In this story, another duality is associated with the first and reinforces it. The farter is not just anyone. He is a “great master!” The great master is represented in egoic consciousnesses as a perfect being, a kind of living concept, without biology and without any faults. It is a living archetype which, suddenly, collapses, at the moment when he farts, the pinnacle of incongruity!

Duality is part of the illusion of the world. It applies to human beings, but also to all things, meals, travels, professions, each molecule of this universe. All the feelings of belonging, of possession, of distance between here and there, between what is me and not me, between what belongs to me and does not belong to me, etc. We are bathed in a totally split world, in relief, duel. But all of this, ultimately, is just a mental game of opposing categories. Everything is constantly changing and not everything is what you think it is. You will see, the real is really exciting!

**COR:** There is one contradictory thing for me and I would like to have your opinion on the subject. Reading a book on positive psychology, I learned that it's better not to answer tit for tat when you're asked an important question. But, suddenly, when we do that, we are no longer in the present moment. If one takes the time to think about what one is going to answer, one will inevitably have a dialogue in our head. So one is anticipating. However, I feel that sometimes if I took time before answering, my answers would be much more coherent and relevant in relation to my values. How to combine present moment and time of reflection?

**SL:** Your question presupposes that the meditative state is a state determined, by the environment, the situation, your mind, your reactions, etc. Now, the well-understood meditative state is a non-determined, non-dependent state (it is well said in the Buddhist scriptures that Enlightenment is

not produced, conditioned, because it is already there!). There is therefore no relationship between the meditative state and the fact of responding tit for tat or not. You do what you want, but you do it mindfully.

Let's draw a parallel with, say, an aikido master. Imagine, the master is attacked, he postpones his response and begins to think. In this case, it is very likely that his opponent will have the upper hand.

But that's not what happens, because this master is a real aikido master. He will not think, but on the contrary, he will slightly anticipate his opponent's attack and act immediately. His assailant finds himself on the ground.

So, should we suspend action and think before we act? Or act spontaneously? Spontaneous action need not be impulsive and unwise action. It can be very relevant. It all depends on its adaptation to the situation. A spontaneous action can even be equivalent to a time of reflection.

Imagine that this aikido master, instead of rushing to destabilize and bring down his opponent, pulls out a Zen koan<sup>50</sup> that will leave the opponent speechless.

So there is no single uniform response to situations because one would be on the path of meditation. Everything will depend on the situation. To think, because we practice meditation daily, that it will transform us into a phlegmatic super-Buddha is a beautiful illusion.

This story is told of a great aikido master, who offers two students to attack him simultaneously. Hop! the two students find themselves on the ground in a flash. The master then proposes to three students to attack him. Hop! On the ground ! Then four students. Hop! On the ground !

---

<sup>50</sup> A koan is a brief anecdote or a short exchange between a master and his disciple, absurd, enigmatic or paradoxical, not requiring ordinary logic.

Then, he suddenly asks for ten attackers! All the students were scared. Is he really going to put ten attackers on the ground? Seriously? The master ran off and... laughing!

**COR:** Love without attachment, isn't that a bit paradoxical?

**SL:** There is a paradox from the point of view of the ego, for which the feeling of love is reduced to a dependence on the other. From a scientific point of view, attachment is a form of instinct, distinct from sexuality (but which can be linked to) and which ensures the links of the young person with the adults who protect him/her. As such, according to psychologists, attachment is almost as imperative as sexuality or other instincts.

Personal development, beyond the ego, leads to a distancing of instincts and in particular of attachment (I am not speaking here of asceticism, of renunciation, but of an interior space which is hollowed out between the self and drives). It is then possible, beyond the ego, to effectively conceive (and live) love without attachment.

**COR:** Not all of us are surrounded by people doing inner work in meditation. Caring, open-minded people. Sometimes the discrepancy with our surroundings is obvious. This gap can be painful, because we can then experience deep feelings of loneliness.

When communication does not pass with those around us, a thousand meditation sessions can bring us balance, but cannot change the "mentality" of others. You end up feeling isolated, apart and that can be painful. So what to do?

**SL:** Having lived the monastic life in my youth, I can assure you that the entourage made up of monks who are supposed to "perform an interior work of meditation" is no better than what you describe.

Also, even in the heart of a monastery, I can assure you that the feeling of loneliness exists and that it is just as

painful. In fact, loneliness is everywhere, because it is nowhere but inside ourselves. It's something that you carry around with you, quite simply.

It's a representation, thoughts, feelings, a whole filter that covers the reality of the world. This filter has several origins. Certain childhood experiences may have favored it. But "normally" it is inherent, it is silly to say, to our biological programs of attachment, psychic courtship and sexuality.

This takes on significantly different accents, whether one is a man or a woman, but the basis is the same for everyone. The proof is that in general all this fades... with age! There comes a time when solitude becomes a delight and you wouldn't want to lose it for anything in the world.

Spiritually speaking, loneliness is the real, it is our fundamental condition. Even when we make ourselves believe that we are "together," in fact, we are alone. Many novels or films deal perfectly with this question. Perhaps you have seen Fellini's "*La dolce vita*"<sup>51</sup>, where we see beings trying to forget their basic loneliness by partying together, but never succeeding.

I think that you are well on a path of spiritual evolution which pushes a part of yourselves to enter into this solitude, but that another part of you, less advanced, refuses it and suffers from it. This discrepancy should gradually, over the years, be absorbed, to move towards a happy loneliness. In any case, I wish it for you!

**COR:** After reading about the block universe<sup>52</sup> I wonder about karma.

If we consider that all phenomena do not unfold according to a law of cause and effect, but according to the reading of an

---

<sup>51</sup> *La dolce vita*, Federico Fellini, 1960.

<sup>52</sup> The universe considered as a space-time "block" according to Einstein's theory of relativity (<https://bit.ly/3EDM1ep>).



underlying informational matrix, a spatio-temporal block universe, what becomes of idea of “karma,” considered as the “retribution” of past acts? What becomes of this notion?

**SL:** This notion of karma is based, in the first instance, on the logic of cause and effect. But, we must go beyond this notion which poses a problem when faced with the design of a block universe. For this, we must consider that karma is inscribed, itself, in the matrix of the universe. Also, what is called karma, the causes and effects which are linked together according to certain laws of retribution, corresponds to a remarkable structure of the matrix or rather to the information of which the matrix is made up.

It is this particular structure of primordial information which means that by reading it one obtains “acts” and “retribution for acts,” that is to say their consequences. There is therefore a logic in all this, but this logic is not at the level of the phenomena, which unfold passively, giving just the appearance of a logic.

The logic is built into the very structure of the matrix. The information matrix is structurally logical. One could say that it is “moral,” if one is not afraid of the abuse of language. Why is the matrix “moral?” Nobody knows. The matrix is as it is, so it is.

At the same time, if you look at actions and their consequences in human beings, there is a lot of idealism and delusion in these stories of “morality” and “karma” and “consequences” and of “retribution” (we find the same illusions with the promises of “paradise” or “hell” in monotheistic religions). Because too often bad deeds are in no way followed by negative consequences for their perpetrators and, conversely, too often good deeds are not followed by any reward.

There is in these well-balanced moral conceptions an accounting illusion. In reality, karmic accounts are rarely balanced or we have to appeal to other *ad hoc* but equally problematic conceptions, such as the succession of lives of an

ego that does not exist. Karma is therefore only a way of speaking of free will and both, karma and free will, are a total illusion. Karma does not exist anymore than the law of cause and effect.

**COR:** It is said in the teachings that the chains of cause and effect are illusory. There is no cause and effect, everything is there at the same time. But what could that possibly mean? If I hit myself on the finger with a hammer (the cause), I will be injured and I will suffer (the consequences), right?

**SL:** This is a point that is not easy to understand, I conceive it. Your point of view is: a cause (a moving hammer striking a finger) and an effect (injury to the finger and suffering of its owner). Now, by saying this, you reduce an infinite sequence of causes and effects to a tiny fraction of this sequence.

Where does the movement of the hammer come from? Where does the hammer itself come from? And you can thus go very far back in the tree of causes, to the beginning of the universe, to the Big Bang! This hammer, which strikes a finger, is in the middle of a very long series of crossed, convergent effects, which occur without you being able to do anything about it. And it will continue, despite you. You won't be able to do anything about it if your finger scars or becomes gangrene and has to be amputated.

Meditate with great attention on this: see the overall line of effects following effects, from the past to the future. But abstracted time. Seen this chain line as a structure, a block, which starts from the Big Bang, goes through your hammer wound and continues through your scarring (or gangrene) and even further, ad infinitum. This "block," extend it now to the whole of the universe, by considering the infinite set of lines of effects. All the crushed fingers, all the scarred fingers, all the amputated fingers, all the interacting things, all the phenomena, all the stars, the whole universe... Then you have the block universe.

In this block universe, there is no causality, no cause-effect sequence. There is also no time or space. Everything is there “at the same time,” in fact, without time. It’s a script, a scenario, in which everything is written. And you, you only discover the scenario as it unfolds and you are part of the film, you are a simple actor, with the extras hammer and finger. Nobody acts. You think you are acting, intentionally hurting yourself, or being clumsy or reckless to hit yourself on the finger with a hammer. But it is a beautiful illusion. You are unwound by the cosmic scenario. You have no control over anything, neither your thoughts, nor your intentions, nor your actions, nor anything that happens to you. You think you are making choices, but ultimately, even your agency is written in the grand script.

I don’t know if I’m going to be able to open you up to the right vision. Maybe not immediately. At first, when we discover the profound teachings of Buddhism, we are mentally dazzled, like a person who passes from the shade of the living room to the unbearable luminosity of a sunny terrace. Continue and deepen your practice of meditation and you can one day grasp the ultimate reality, without cause and without effect.

**COR:** They say that “hope springs eternal.” And I realize how universal this feeling of hope is and totally invades my life. In meditation, we are taught to be there, without expectation, whereas as soon as we get up from the cushion, we leave in an uninterrupted flow of hopes, that things change, that situations evolve. I sometimes have the impression, through my “hopes,” that I finally refuse the world, reality as it is. And I don’t find that very Buddhist!

**SL:** According to the Buddha’s teachings, at the base there is reality, things as they are, the “that’s like it is.” And then, above, the ego permanently spreads a thick layer of interpretations, it builds its own reality, from the real. We can then speak of indexing, like filters placed on the real.

The first of these indexing is hope. Hope is this relationship to the world, this vision of the world, this information stuck on the world, that “it will happen,” that “what we want will be obtained,” that “there will be a solution,” like that “it will work out” and so on.

Take any of your “shitty” situations in life and you have the hope that goes with it. This famous “hope that springs eternal.” And the reverse indexing of hope is another indexing called despair. The despair that leads to the feeling of suffering, sadness, depression, inner misery and negative prophecies.

Thus, hope and despair are the two typical indexing that we relate to the real. They are based on the duality between this and that, between me and the non-me, me and the other. Between what is good, what is bad, what is desirable and what is undesirable, etc.

The abandonment of this hope/despair indexing is called “hopelessness”. There is a big difference between despair and hopelessness and they should not be confused. Hopelessness is not despair. Despair is in duality, with its connotation of despair and death. Hopelessness is the total absence of the hope label. This hopelessness, which involves the dissolution of the ego, is very difficult to achieve. And, if we dig a little deeper, we realize that we always have a little hope (or despair) somewhere. This is to be observed and abandoned.

**COR:** I find Buddhism quite contradictory because, on the one hand, we are told about reincarnation and, on the other hand, we are told that the ego is illusory. So what reincarnates?

**SL:** Buddhism is indeed full of paradoxes. But they are only apparent. In depth, the teachings are entirely rational and coherent. The paradoxes appear both because the lessons use a lot of metaphors and figurative expressions, but also because they are aimed at different “levels” of audiences.

The ego that reincarnates, whereas the ego has no existence. This false paradox mixes a lower level of teaching with a higher level. At the lower level, Buddhism practically behaves like a religion. He lays down a principle: the reincarnation of the ego, in order to meet two fundamental needs of the multitude (the "clients"). First, to offer hope in the face of the anguish of death and, second, to found a system of moral constraint, in order to encourage people to behave well. Hence these beliefs in an ego that reincarnates (ie an afterlife), the target of its reincarnation depending on the good or bad deeds (karma) during the present life.

At the higher level of teaching, there is no ego, therefore no reincarnating ego, therefore there is nothing after death (the hopelessness here is total) and there is has no morals. Good behavior is simply the consequence of the absence of ego and the compassionate openness to the world and to others, such as can be developed through the practice of meditation and the study of the teachings.

A second paradox concerns the notion of karma. The teachings tell us that there is karma, as a system of retribution for actions, good or bad, which suggests a causality, causes and effects that follow one another. At the same time, the teachings also tell us that there are no causes and effects, that everything is there, in an eternal now. The cause-effect sequence would then be only an illusion.

Modern science tends to confirm this Buddhist intuition, with the block universe.

In fact, here again, we are dealing with two levels of education. For the common we present the causal system of karma, in order to give a simple and understandable basis to morality. While at the level of higher teachings, karma disappears, as well as the cause-effect sequence, which is an illusion.

A final paradox concerns the choices that the ego must make. Buddhism has a number of rules to follow, precepts and instructions, for meditation, for example. The ego

therefore makes the choice between following or not following the rules, transgressing them or respecting them. And, in our relation to this law, as ego we are referred to the notion of karma, which I have just mentioned. But, on the other hand, other more advanced teachings first tell us that the ego does not really exist, that it is an amalgamation of tendencies and an illusion. Then, that there are no choices to make or rules to follow, since all this is the action of the ego (the egos: those who lay down the rules and those who follow them or transgress them).

We thus see that the apparent paradoxes of Buddhism are only the effects of the confusion between the different levels of teachings.

**COR:** In your opinion, what are the main basic principles of Buddhism?

**SL:** I'll tell you about the three pillars of the path. They are essential, all three, and we cannot do without any of them if we want to advance effectively on the spiritual path.

The first pillar is "faith" (it is expressed in Buddhism with commitment, "taking refuge"). This faith establishes the motivation to continue on the path. It has no connection, of course, with any faith or religious belief. It is in no way a question of believing in God, Jesus or Buddha (in the latter case, it would be a question of Buddha as an illusory entity with a divine feature).

This faith is simply trusting that Enlightenment exists, that's all. It is a question of conceiving, in confidence, that others have reached this Enlightenment and therefore that it exists. In this sense, only, one can also say "to believe in Buddha." But, we must specify here that "Buddha" means the Enlightened. So, it is a question of believing in the fact that a human being could experience enlightenment and that, for that, he was called the Enlightened one. But nothing more. This human being is in no way a deity.

It is the principle of Enlightenment in which we believe, in a metonymic way, through this personality, the Buddha Shakyamuni. This “belief” is fundamental, because you are not yet enlightened and, the Enlightenment being a-conceptual, you cannot represent it to yourselves and no one can describe it to you. Therefore, to conceive that Enlightenment exists is indeed a pure act of faith.

This faith is essential to be able to be motivated in the continuation of the journey on the path to Enlightenment. Because, without this motivation, there will necessarily come a time when you will drop both your intellectual reflections and meditation.

In summary, this “faith in Enlightenment” is formulated as follows: Enlightenment exists, it is attainable, others have already reached it before me and others will reach it after me.

The second pillar is intellect, intelligence. This means that the work on the path is necessarily, also, an intellectual work. In meditation and from the experience of meditation. It is a question, in an intellectual way, through the various metaphors presented by the teachings, of having an understanding, an analysis, a form of approximate representation, of what Enlightenment is, or rather, of what it is not.

The intellectual vision of the ultimate reality founds like a second motivation to reach the Enlightenment. We have a primary motivation, alive, based on trust, commitment, faith in Enlightenment; and then, you have a second motivation which is based on the kind of conviction you arrive at, by making your intellect work around the teachings.

Finally, the third pillar of the path is meditation, the putting into practice of the teachings. Meditation is what will make it possible to experience the advances towards Enlightenment.

Note that there is no obligatory, necessary link between meditation and Enlightenment. Enlightenment is not the

goal or the result of meditation. Enlightenment or *Nirvāṇa*, being at the same time a-conceptual, non-conditioned by anything and independent of everything (therefore not dependent on meditative practice), while being identical to *Samsāra*, it can arise at any time, during meditation or between meditations or anytime.

However, it is clear that meditative practice, added to faith and intellectual work, helps the practitioner to advance towards Enlightenment.

Thus, the three pillars are necessary. Because if you do not have faith, sooner or later, you will become discouraged and you will stop thinking and you will stop meditating, for lack of sufficient motivation.

If you have faith and you work with your intellect the metaphors of the teaching, but you don't meditate, you may eventually become a scholar, an ultimate reality expert, but you probably never will experience it.

Or you have faith, you practice meditation, but you don't seek to understand metaphors. In this case, you will succumb to spiritual materialism, that is, to use meditation both to achieve goals and to strengthen the ego.

That said, and to do with the paradox, Enlightenment being at the same time a-conceptual, unconditioned and independent, it is quite possible to experience it (most often without knowing it), without having faith, without ever having thought about it and without really ever having meditated...

**COR:** We often talk about compassion in meditation. Only, knowing that the ego is illusory and that other beings (egos) are themselves illusory, what is the injunction of "compassion for all beings" worth? This seems to be a moral injunction whose relationship to meditation, here and now, is irrelevant. Unless...



**SL:** In fact, compassion is not valid for beings, egos, nor for the ego that creates it, all being illusory. It is just a technique intended to place the meditator in a peaceful state of mind. In fact, without compassion, the ego finds itself locked in conflicting, antagonistic mental states, strong preoccupations and strong emotions which disturb the flow of its meditation.

By using the technique of compassion projected onto beings and by showing oneself compassionate in daily life, one avoids all these disorders of thought and affect which block meditative progress.



## **BUDDHISM AND RELIGION**

**COR:** Are beliefs soluble in meditation?

**SL:** From the Buddhist point of view, beliefs are loaded with paradox. The Buddhist approach is particularly tolerant and even welcoming, vis-à-vis beliefs, whether religious or otherwise. There is, it seems, no incompatibility and one can practice meditation in parallel with one's beliefs and worship activities. However, a number of Buddhist views seriously challenge this status quo. And then, Buddhism itself, in its "religious" aspects, offers a certain number of beliefs such as reincarnation, karma, the divinization of the Buddha, etc.

However, difficulties arise if we consider that the one who conceives the beliefs, the ego, has no reality of its own, it is only an aggregate of tendencies, therefore a belief itself. Beliefs conceived by a belief, it's quite surreal!

Then, for the universe (including the proper body) it is worse, because it is reduced to phenomena in an egotic consciousness which itself, as we have just seen, has no consistency. From there, it is difficult to give any credence to the beliefs.

So, what about meditation in all of this? Basically, the teachings tell us: it is to be there... that's all. Ah, really? So if I feel electricity in my body, it's not "subtle" energy?

No.

If I have the impression that I am leaving my body, isn't it that there is an "astral" body?

No.

If I feel like an energy rising or accumulating, isn't it that there are "chakras?"

No.

If I'm hugging a tree and I feel something unusual, doesn't the tree have a "vibration," an "energy?"

No.

If I see an angel, God or something else while meditating, isn't it that there are supernatural beings?

No. No. No. Nope...

If you have understood the path of meditation correctly, make your own this advice oft-repeated in the Tibetan scriptures: "Behold, all substances are of my own mind, and this mind is empty, unborn, and endless."<sup>53</sup>

**COR:** In Buddhism, the person of the Buddha is not, officially, considered divine. Nevertheless, can we consider the Buddha as a saint, an example of humanity?

**SL:** In fact, at the risk of shocking you, I'm going to tell you that there is no Buddha. The Buddha is a sort of spiritual ideal, a legend, but Buddhas don't exist and never have and never will. There may be "warriors" who tend towards this ideal, but they only tend towards it, always...

Of course, in saying this, I am not questioning the historical existence of Prince Siddhārtha Gautama aka Shakyamuni, nor the profound value of his teachings, nor the fact that for millions of people he was transformed into a divine personage, as part of a Buddhist cult.

---

<sup>53</sup> Evans-Wentz, W. Y.; Samdup, Kazi Dawa. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Oxford University Press, 2000.

By saying that the Buddha does not exist, I mean that one should not forget the real man under the symbol. That one does not have to play this game of the ego which consists in “imitating Buddha!” Like all human beings, Gautama was an imperfect being. He took years to agree to license an order of nuns and women were always considered inferior beings. It seems that one would have to be reborn as a man to be able to reach Enlightenment! Isn’t that spiritual sexism?

The Buddha never questioned the Indian caste system. He was fully in the spirit of his time and his culture. But he was not there in the detachment, the neutrality. No, he was clearly on his side for the business of the century. An attitude that doesn’t sound very... Buddha, does it?

What else can we say about the venerable Lama Chögyam Trungpa and his alcoholism? The effects of the trauma linked to the Chinese invasion of his country? Trauma related to his exile? Very probably. I could testify to that myself<sup>54</sup>. It is obvious that being a bodhisattva<sup>55</sup> does not protect against post-traumatic stress.

Among the masters, great or small, recognized as “Enlightened” or not, we find everything. There are charlatans, sex abusers, criminals, racists, manipulators, people who are there just to do business and make lots of money.

You must never place any blind trust in a proclaimed or self-proclaimed master. You must always receive the teachings of a master with a very critical eye and form your own opinion. You should never “worship” or imitate a master, but be yourself and follow your own Path. The Path is lonely, I remind you.

---

<sup>54</sup> Scarlet Lama himself had to go into exile from Tibet following the Chinese invasion and the massacres of monks carried out by the Chinese authorities.

<sup>55</sup> A bodhisattva means in Buddhism a future and almost Enlightened before it has reached Enlightenment.

And then, even stronger! Nor do I, Scarlet Lama Rinpoche, consider myself a valid teacher and do not swallow my teachings like a frog swallows flies. Be critical, think for yourself.

The real master, the one who never cheats, is yourself and life situations. As such, you must see the masters, including the Buddha, as simply a “life situation,” of your life. The masters themselves are only phenomena, like dreams that populate your consciousness. Dreams are just an illusion, aren’t they?

**COR:** What can you say about the religious aspects of Buddhism?

**SL:** Basically, Buddhism is not a religion. He has no conception of a deity, hell or paradise. He does not promise “salvation” or the forgiveness of sins. On the other hand, we can say that there are two Buddhisms.

Buddhism with a religious aspect which is addressed to the common people and which looks exactly like a form of religion. We say the Buddhist religion, by the way. In this Buddhism, this version of Buddhism, the figure of the Buddha is worshiped as a deity, *Nirvāṇa* is understood as a kind of “paradise” and the idea of “purification” through rituals and prayers serves as a management of sins.

The second version of Buddhism, which practically addresses the “initiates,” is quite different. This version is in no way a “religion.” The Buddha is only a human like other humans. I mean there is nothing “divine” or even sacred about it. *Nirvāṇa* is equal to *Samṣāra*. *Nirvāṇa* is therefore in no way a “paradise,” on Earth or elsewhere, in this life or in another. *Nirvāṇa* is an ineffable experience that allows us to understand and experience ultimate reality. But “reaching” *Nirvāṇa* does not mean that one becomes superhuman or divine or superman or whatever. When one reaches this experience, one is also there, in the *Samṣāra*, the world of

appearances and the circle of desires. We don't go somewhere else, we don't start to levitate and the earth doesn't start to shake (except tectonic chance, without any connection!). It is obviously to this second version of Buddhism to which I refer in my teachings.

One could also subdivide the "initiated" version of Buddhism into two sub-branches. A branch, let's say "politically correct" and a branch, let's say "subversive." In the politically correct branch, we are dealing with a "good-natured" Buddhism, very... accommodating. Which bents over backwards, but which, in return, does not help a lot of people. One keeps our reserve from the point of view of religions.

Good-natured Buddhism will tell you, "No problem! Do you have a religion? Do you believe in God? No problem! Buddhism is soluble in everything. You can keep your religion. You see how accommodating it is. To the point that no one is disturbed. This is the kind of Buddhism that will fully promote "spiritual materialism," as Chögyam Trungpa was able to denounce it<sup>56</sup>. People will keep their basic religion and will also practice meditation... Why? For the benefits it brings, do they believe? Because it's fashionable? By need of exoticism? In any case, it will certainly not be to understand what Enlightenment really is nor the ultimate reality.

And they are right! Because the ultimate reality is far too disturbing for their religion. In the abrupt version of Buddhism, the relationship to religions is without any concession. None! Do you have a religion? Well, you will have to think about getting rid of it, because this religion will be a very serious hindrance to the journey on the Path.

Nor is it a question of changing ism. To pass from a religion to Buddhism. Even if you tell me that you are "Buddhist," I will ask you to get rid of Buddhism. It's about

---

<sup>56</sup> Chögyam Trungpa, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*. Shambhala Publications, Berkeley, 1973.

getting rid of all beliefs. Why? Because any belief is the affirmation of a duality. There is the believer and what he believes in, such is the structure of the religious ego (see part 1).

Allow me just a parenthesis concerning the belief, the “faith,” in Enlightenment. This belief is indeed a form of duality. But it is a duality which promises and implies its dissolution. Whereas for religions, belief is an end in itself. We will not stop believing, normally.

At the beginning of the Path, the ego is at work in its spiritual materialism, in the practice of meditation, in intellection. However, the only belief that leads to its own self-destruction is the belief in Enlightenment, in the non-existence of the ego. Enlightenment involves the destruction of all beliefs, even the belief in Enlightenment.

At the beginning, the belief in the Enlightenment founds the motivation to engage in the Path, then to follow it until the end. But, afterwards, when the Enlightenment becomes an experience (perhaps one should say a “non-experience”), the belief, the faith in the Enlightenment, disappears.

If we believe in anything other than Enlightenment, especially in a divinity, in a religion, then we are in the middle of duality and we are not ready to get out of it. And the more we admit that we are faced with an absolute God who fills the whole universe, the less we will be able to get out of it.

So, you must know, clearly, the teachings of “true” Buddhism are non-religious. They are not against religion, but religion no longer makes sense there. It enters into the order of the illusions of the ego. Religion is an aspect of *Samsāra*. Then, the teachings of this Buddhism will invite you to leave, to abandon your religion.

This is something to know from the start. Because if for you, religion is the “stuff that will never be touched,” it is



## THE SCARLET LAMA

better that you avoid Buddhism or settle for a watered down Buddhism. Run away while there's still time!



## BUDDHISM AND SCIENCE

**COR:** I can't quite understand the concept of indexing. Could you tell me more?

**SL:** The very term indexing belongs to information theories. Indexing is information about information. We could then speak of meta-information. For example, you have a library of a hundred books. To find your way around, you will open a spreadsheet program and you will create an "index." You will index your books. You will classify them by genres, years of publication, authors, publishers, number of pages, etc. All this indexing information relates to this other information which is the books as objects, but also as carriers of text, of information.

Our brain works from many indexing that dress the real and translate it into "our reality." Try to look at a text, written in an alphabet that you know how to read or better written in your own language. Try looking at this text without reading it. You will see that it is practically impossible. Your brain constantly, immediately and automatically indexes the text and "reads" despite you.

Take a bowl. Any bowl. Your bowl for morning coffee or a Tibetan singing bowl. It is a simple and tangible object: a Tibetan bowl.

Basically, this bowl does not exist. It has no independence. If we examine its temporality, it is a bowl whose matter, the

metals of which it is made, were synthesized in a star and which constitute the crust of our so-called “rocky” planet. Metals recovered, treated, according to the genius of human beings, to make this object, with this circular and concave shape, this bowl.

Subsequently, after thousands, millions, billions of years, one can imagine that these metals will disintegrate, the atoms will scatter, even be transmuted into other atoms by returning to the heart of a star and this bowl will then have completely disappeared.

And even in the present time, from moment to moment, this bowl is dependent on the terrestrial gravity which fixes it on the ground. It is dependent on the atmospheric conditions around it, which can affect its surface condition. Satellized in the vacuum of space, its future would be linked to the attacks of various cosmic rays which, over millions of years, would eventually disintegrate it.

In a word, this bowl is dependent on everything, on everything that made it up and on everything that will make it disappear. We can then say that this bowl does not exist in the sense that it is only a piece in the informational magma, in the whole of the informational matrix. It's just a very small piece. In other words, it is nothing.

But there. This bowl will take on meaning, will be individualized in a way, will become an apparently independent object, because it will be designated as such by means of an indexing, as a “bowl.” As a generic concept “bowl,” designating all bowls and, as a specific, particular object, “that bowl” or a “Tibetan bowl” or “your bowl” or “my bowl” which is here in this moment.

And, because of the indexing, we will have the illusion that this bowl occupies a place in space, at a certain distance, with a three-dimensionality, throughout a duration. With more, elements of shape, texture, color. And if I use it, with elements related to touch, sound, even smell or taste.

All these characteristic elements of the bowl are indexing that will highlight this bowl. And all these indexing are information about the basic information of the bowl, in itself, before any indexing. I don't say the bowl "in itself" in the sense of the bowl before any indexing.

It's as if you were a member of a very primitive tribe, having never made any utensil as bowl or container type and who suddenly find themselves faced with this bowl, at first, incomprehensible, that is to say without any indexing (except the one that says "unknown and incomprehensible object").

It is also the bowl as if caught in the informational magma. The bowl as basic information in the information matrix. In this informational magma, the indexing come as if to extirpate particular, remarkable, specific phenomena. Like everyday objects. Or even living beings, like "my dog," "my cat," "my wife," "my husband," or non-living things, like "my car," "my house," the tree at the end of the garden, such a planet, such a star, etc.

Imagine how a human encounter takes place. You are, at the start, in a group of complete strangers. Then, little by little or immediately, somewhat at random, you meet such and such a person. And suddenly that person becomes something else. You make "the" encounter, the one of your life, the love of your life (well, that's what you think at the beginning, when this huge indexing takes place: the feeling of love). Indexing is therefore information about information. This indexing involves consciousness and memory...

**COR:** Can you explain the "ultimate reality" to me in a few words?

**SL:** It is possible to consider three levels of apprehension of the world. First, the purely realistic level. A thought is produced by a brain. This brain is inside a body, this body

itself being in a universe. The universe is outside of body and mind, just as the body is outside of mind, as well.

And to complete this realistic vision, the body refers to a self, an ego. An ego that presents a form of "reality," of personality, embodied in a body, itself located in a space and a temporality, a universe.

Then, in a second level of apprehension, we carry out a so-called "phenomenological" reduction to realize that, ultimately, the world comes down to phenomena. "Phenomenon" means that we never have direct access to the world, nor even to the body directly. All our experience is confined to the mind. This is why we call "phenomena" what, of the world, is lived by us in consciousness.

We have only phenomena to put in our mouths. Even, if you think about it, only information. Because, as soon as the signals coming from the world or the body are transformed into sensory nerve impulses, we enter the realm of information and what our brain deals with is indeed information.

The body itself is a phenomenon, just like the ego itself, which is also only one phenomenon among other phenomena. The ego, through its characteristics, tendencies, emotions, reactions, through the meaning it gives to things, only places indexing, that is to say information about other information.

We have the basic information, that is to say the universe as a product of the reading of an informational matrix and, above that, for us, as ego consciousness, we have these meta-information that is indexing.

Finally, the third level of apprehension of the universe corresponds to the ultimate reality. At the second level, we still had phenomena unfolding. Which influence each other and take place according to a spatio-temporal framework, of cause and effect.

We will realize, by pushing more towards the ultimate reality, that all this is ultimately only an illusion. Because a more thorough analysis leads us to consider a phenomenal block, or rather, an informational block. What is this informational block?

Look at your outstretched arm. You will lift it slowly. At the phenomenal level, a whole host of causes make you to “raise your arm.” Causes and effects are linked, at all levels, physical, material, mental, motivational, cerebral, nervous, neuronal, chemical, electrical, down to the fundamental particles, molecules, atoms, protons and electrons, etc.

All of these causes and effects will make your arm go up first a millimeter, then another millimeter and so on, from position A to position B. As for the ultimate reality, it is presented as a “block” which contains all the positions of the arm, from A to B. Which also means, the set of states of all the associated phenomena that I have just mentioned, from the objects to the electrons via thinking and motivation.

A block, therefore, which contains in an informational form, all the positions of the arm as well as the set of conditions which preside over all the positions of the arm. This is the “ultimate reality.”

From the point of view of the ego, this informational (or phenomenal) block gives the appearance of phenomena which are connected, because the block is “read” (one could also say “scanned”), layer of information after layer of information, in a sequential way, a bit like the images of a film which follow one another quickly, giving the illusion of movement.

This process gives the ego the illusion of a three-dimensional world and a temporality in which phenomena in motion and interaction take place. It is also what gives the impression of a sequence in the form of causes and their effects. Whereas at the base, we only have a block of information, which contains neither time nor space and which is neither contained in a time nor in a space.

This block means that everything is there, in a single “instant.” To take an image, from a DVD, its reading produces a film, containing a three-dimensional universe for an hour and a half. But if you look at this DVD as an information carrier, compared to the universe of the film, it is outside the time and space of the film. It is the “reading” of this basic information, through a process of “awareness,” which results in a spatial universe that unfolds in a temporality.

Then, from this first illusion of space and time, “labels” are stuck on these illusory phenomena. These labels are themselves information. These are indexing, which designate and animate the characteristics (attractions, repulsions, indifference, emotions and mental behaviors). All this being also totally illusory.

I am convinced that I have the freedom to raise or lower my arm, but that is wrong! I have no freedom. I raise and lower my arm, but basically it's just a phenomenal block that describes the raising and lowering of my arm and in that phenomenal (informational) block there's additionally an informative index that says “I am free to raise and lower my arm.”

Thus, at the level of the information block, there is no ego, no freedom. This is the ultimate reality. The flag says... “Look how well I express myself, pushing my folds and contours, sometimes here, sometimes there. There, I lift my dress, here, I lower it, I wave, I wrinkle and smooth, I do what I want, after all.” But no one is unaware that the flag is in the greatest illusion, for it never ceases to be animated by the wind and it is only by a mad belief that it attributes to its own will which is only the influence of a great current of air to which it owes all its expression and existence.

Such is the human, who similarly claims his own will, says that he expresses himself freely, claims to control his thoughts, his emotions and his actions, his movements and his future, having the permanent illusion to make decisions, to choose this instead of that, to go here instead of there.



Whereas, ultimately, he is only the toy of an invisible frame whose information he blindly follows.

So, this human ego, infatuated with itself, watch it challenge us: "See, he says, I predict that I will immediately raise my right arm, that's it I raise it, look at it!" without realizing, for a single moment, that an underlying matrix has commanded both his will and his gesture and his sufficiency, which he calls freedom.

**COR:** I have some difficulty understanding the links between information and phenomena. Could you tell me more?

**SL:** The starting point is the informational matrix, which underlies all phenomena. To illustrate this, let's take a DVD. It's a metaphor. If you look at a DVD under a microscope, the information is pits and lands on the surface of the disc. From there, we ask ourselves the following questions:

- Is information the DVD?
- Nope.
- Is information pits and lands?
- Nope.

Because we must not forget that the information could be "dah-dah-dah-dit-dah-dit-dah-dit-dit-dit...", so sound information. It could be light flashes of different durations and so on. It could be a succession of magnetic points on the surface of a hard disk. Therefore, we must distinguish the information from its support and thus abstract the information from its support.

And, as the supports are part of the phenomena, the primary information, constitutive of the universe is without support, since all the supports that one can imagine emerge from this matrix.

The informational matrix itself has no support, it is information without support. When you watch a DVD, the information is not this DVD, it is not pits and lands, it is the

succession of changes between pits and lands. This is truly information. The logic of information.

So, we will never find information around the corner. Information is therefore transcendent to the phenomenal world that emanates from it. So, in a way, from the phenomenal point of view, one could say that this primordial information does not exist. It exists because we are here talking about it and we exist. But we do not exist more than this information.

The conclusion is that there is consubstantiality between primordial information and phenomena. And the conclusion to this conclusion is that phenomena are pure information.

When the Buddhist teachings tell us that the phenomenal world is like a dream, they are simply saying that phenomena are pure information.

There is no matter, there is no energy, in the “hard” sense in which we usually understand it. There is only dream, there is only information.

In a way, there is no matrix underlying the universe, since the informational matrix and the phenomena, ultimately, are the same thing. This is the starting point.

From these purely informational phenomena, which have no essence, which have nothing underlying, which are just pure information, from there, there are certain phenomena which produce something new, which is meta-information. That is, information about information. It is indexing, as it occurs, from the living, or in any case from interactions, and which becomes excessively complex in human beings.

Indexing is therefore meta-information, it is information about primordial information or phenomenal information, about phenomena:

“This is my self, my ego, this is my body, this is the world outside my body, this is my visual, auditory, etc. sensation, this is my emotion, this is my reaction, this is my concept, this is my theory, my belief and so on...”

All of this is called “indexing,” that is, information about basic, phenomenal information, meta-information. In fact, it’s the same as when we talk about information on a DVD, a hard disk, in a computer, in a sound message and so on. All this also falls within the framework of meta-information. Information within information or information about information.

In fact, it is important to distinguish the two levels of information: primordial, basic information, which constitutes the very body of all phenomena, and information as a phenomenon within the phenomenon (this is the information according to Shannon<sup>57</sup>), or information within information. And indexing is indeed information within information, meta-information. From there, one could consider meta-information as an “over-phenomenon,” but ultimately, it is never anything but a phenomenon.

The notion of interaction is important to consider in order to fully understand meta-information. The phenomena give the appearance of interacting with each other. Whereas at the basic information level, there is no interaction. In reference to what is described as the informational matrix, what is considered as “interaction” is, neither more nor less, than a structure of this matrix (it is a “geometry” according to Einstein and relativity physicists).

One would say that the phenomena “behave,” but, in fact, it is just the informational matrix which is structured in this way. One has the impression that the Earth revolves around the Sun, that it behaves according to the laws of gravitation, whereas at the base, at the informational level, the trajectory of the Earth around the Sun is only a structure in the form of a helical spring<sup>58</sup>, the turns of which are in contact with each other with a thickness of a Planck length and it is this structure which describes the trajectory of our planet.

---

<sup>57</sup> Claude Shannon, the creator of information theory.

<sup>58</sup> <https://youtu.be/EoKm6P2Sl6w>

There is therefore no force, no energy, no gravitation, no behavior or interaction, strictly speaking. In the matrix, it is just a "description."

On the other hand, at the meta-informational level, this basic informational description is translated into interaction, in the form of apparent "natural laws," bringing into play "forces," "energies," etc. The same is true of the purely mechanical interactions with which we deal in this world. Whether it's being punched in the nose or hammered on the finger, whether it's the collision between two vehicles in a traffic accident, whether it's the romantic and sexual interaction with a partner, whether it is insulting someone or saying loving words to him/her, whether it is practical information given to someone or shaking hands to greet each other, whether it's heating water to make tea and so on, all these interactions, at all levels (macro-mechanical, micro-mechanical, molecular, chemical, electrical, electronic, atomic, etc.), are over-information or meta-information. Meta-information is the foundation of interaction.

Thinking about it, we realize that Einstein's theory of relativity, which describes gravitation, not like Newton, like a force of attraction with its laws, but like a curvature of space-time, is on the verge of designing an information matrix. Because one can conceive that such a matrix describes, in the form of topological information, the curved space, around the Sun, in which the trajectory of the Earth winds.

Let's take the example of a very simple interaction system: the water molecule. At the start, we have two hydrogen atoms (each with a proton and an electron that revolves around it). We have an oxygen atom (made up of eight protons and eight neutrons which form the nucleus around which eight electrons revolve). By chemical affinity, these three atoms (two hydrogens and one oxygen) form a hydrogen oxide by exchanging their peripheral electrons. Which gives a molecule of water.

This water molecule can be easily formed by bringing together hydrogen and oxygen and providing energy in the form of heat (with a spark or combustion). It's a common experience in high school. The proximity of the atoms and the heat cause their bonding in a molecule  $H_2O$ , water.

Where is the interaction in this molecular system? It resides in atomic bonds via electronic exchanges. Peripheral electrons of atoms pass from nucleus to nucleus, forming a relatively stable three-atom system. We can see this as a kind of exchange of information, each atom "testing" the presence of the other two in the molecule.

The indexing which appears in this molecule corresponds to these exchanges of electronic information. We could see this, metaphorically, as a personalization of atoms and a way they have of "recognizing" themselves as existing for each other. For example, the oxygen atom can, through the exchange of information between its nucleus (eight protons and eight neutrons) and its eight electrons, recognize itself as being "itself," a kind of primitive, embryonic self, "ego" of the oxygen atom.

Then, similarly, by the exchanges of information with the two hydrogen atoms with which it is associated, it can recognize itself as itself differentiated from the others, "here it is me and outside of me there is hydrogen." You have to realize that basically, this oxygen-hydrogen interaction is only primordial, basic information. At this level there is no heat, no force, no energy, no interaction of any kind. Heat, force, energy, fundamental particles, are basically just information.

And, thereafter, this information on information, through the various interactions, extends more and more to other levels, for example, by associating the molecules between them, forming various "bodies," plasmatic, gases, liquids or solids. And this continues to complex living organisms that exchange information, interact with their environment and discriminate between what is "me" and what is "not me."

**COR:** Within the framework of a conception of ultimate reality according to Buddhist teachings, what becomes of the ego? Logically, I feel like it should disappear, somehow. Did I understand well?

**SL:** Usually, people see themselves with an ego, a consciousness, embodied in their own body and all inserted into a universe. This vision of things is not the ultimate reality.

The ultimate reality, that which corresponds to *Śūnyatā*, as it can be perceived in deep meditation, is: a bodily phenomenon, in a phenomenal universe (therefore a bodily phenomenon among other phenomena), equipped with a consciousness egotic, which is itself only a phenomenon, and which maintains the illusion of being an absolute consciousness (while it is only a relative consciousness, purely phenomenal, therefore interdependent).

In fact, according to ultimate reality, there is nothing, there is no one. There are only phenomena and your body and your ego consciousness are only phenomena among all other phenomena. There are therefore only phenomena, therefore there is nothing!

If we describe things according to the model of the informational matrix: there is the informational matrix, there is the reading of the informational matrix, which generates the phenomenal universe, including the embodied ego, but in fact, concerning this reading of the matrix, there is nothing that reads! It's self-reading, in a way: the matrix reads itself.

And if you manage to conceive of this, you come to see the embodied ego as being no different from a tree, a stone, a grass, a liter of water, a planet... There is no difference. The ego is completely illusory.

**COR:** I think I understood the block universe, the informational matrix, quite well. However, I still wonder

who “reads” the block universe. What I have read about this has not seemed very clear to me.

**SL:** Before answering your question of “who reads,” allow me to return for a moment to the block universe.

Like everyone else, you must have heard of space-time or time as the “fourth dimension,” but few people are able to conceive exactly what this means for their lives and beyond.

Time as a fourth dimension means that there are the three spatial dimensions of the universe ( $x$ ,  $y$ ,  $z$  or length, width, height or depth), but time,  $t$ , is considered a fourth dimension and not as a separate concept. Indeed, in the classic vision, and it is the one that we all have, there is the spatial universe with its three spatial dimensions and this universe... lasts, it is provided with a duration, a time which is flows, but there is no link between space and time. Time is well apart and, moreover, it is immutable and flows everywhere in the universe uniformly.

However, what Einstein demonstrated, with his theory of relativity, is that time is in no way “apart,” it is simply a fourth dimension and like the other dimensions it can change, in particular accelerate or slow down, depending on where you are, the presence of massive bodies or the speed of movement.

For example, without taking into account this dimension of time, our GPS systems could not function in a sufficiently precise and stable way to be really usable. It is thanks to the correcting equations of relativity, thanks to this concept of time as the fourth dimension, that our GPS can work and locate us to the nearest meter.

However, even if some have understood this, time as the fourth dimension, therefore space-time forming the whole of the universe, rare are the people who can really imagine all that this represents and implies.

People have intellectually integrated space-time as a concept, but their vision of the current universe, on a daily

basis, has remained “classic,” time is always apart (except for GPS, but that, we don’t kinda sucks, huh?).

A first advance consists in taking into account what science has explained to us, namely that, from the “start<sup>59</sup>,” from the “Big Bang,” all the information in the universe, during the billions of years of its existence, past, present and future, IS ALREADY HERE! This means that you, there, on this day when you read these lines, you were already programmed from the Big Bang. Well, yes, that’s what time really implies as a fourth dimension. But to say this: “all the information is already there from the start of the universe,” still remains a “classic” vision that has barely been improved.

We have only reversed the point of view: for an absolute time, which is no longer absolute, since it has become (simple) the fourth dimension, we have substituted an imaginary observer who would see, inscribed in the Big Bang, all the information “in time” of the universe. As if such an observer external to the universe, in some way absolute, could exist. It doesn’t exist, of course, except in our imagination.

In fact, what the concept of space-time implies is a completely different vision, with “catastrophic” consequences! Imagine... The spatial universe, with its three dimensions, but without duration, without time. In fact, this 3D universe will still last. This duration cannot be zero. The universe without time, lasts a tiny instant (a Planck duration, in fact,  $10^{-44}$  seconds) and then, presto, nothing. A kind of strobe universe that lasts much less than the time of a flash.

Now that you fully adhere to the idea of time as the fourth dimension of the universe, you will no longer say: the three-dimensional universe LASTS (time being apart), no, you will

---

<sup>59</sup> “Start,” and all equivalent terms of succession, should not be understood as an indication of time, but as an indication of a process out of time.



consider the “block” that forms the universe with its four dimensions.

Imagine then a sphere, which starts from the initial size of a Planck length, ie  $1.62 \times 10^{-35}$  meters and which expands in a fraction of a second to reach an infinite size. This expansion generates increasingly complex informational structures along the axis of expansion.

This informational structure (the matrix) corresponds to the block universe. The block universe being, of course, neither in a “space” nor in a “time,” since it is from it that space and time emanate. The block universe, as an informational matrix, carries information concerning a spatio-temporal universe. This is the ultimate reality. This means that everything is already there (for an imaginary observer who does not exist and who would be observing the block universe).

What “reads” this block universe-information, so that we can pass from information to the actualization of a three-dimensional universe which lasts, in a temporality?

In fact, it is the informational structures themselves that are at the origin of “reading.” Because nothing outside the block universe can read the block universe, because everything is in the block universe. So it’s the block universe that kind of reads itself.

Its structures correspond to interactions which, at the start of the expansion, are simple and elementary (interactions between fundamental particles, between atoms, between molecules), to become more and more complex, with the interactions between bodies, between bodies and forces, fields and energy, then between matter and the biological, then the mind. These interactions, which lead to consciousness (the most complex interaction there is), correspond to the “reading” of the matrix.

Let’s take a metaphor, that of the DVD. This DVD contains a movie. Let’s take a well-known movie “The Bridges of

Madison County<sup>60</sup>.” On this DVD is engraved all the information of a piece of universe in three dimensions, which lasts two hours fifteen minutes<sup>61</sup>. In this universe, there are at least two people, who act, who have freedom, free will, who experience emotions, who make choices and think and are aware of themselves and their existential situation.

If you were with Robert and Francesca, you would think you were in a “classic” universe, with three spatial dimensions and... time goes by. But there’s also you, outside the film, with this DVD in your hand. Well, this DVD is the block universe, space-time, of Robert and Francesca.

Problem: the DVD is necessarily read. For the film to happen, to unfold, you have to “read” the DVD. If you just look at the DVD, even with a microscope, you will never see Robert and Francesca loving each other. You will only see pits and lands, 0s and 1s of a language, of a binary code. To be able to “animate,” give a soul to this information, contained on the surface of the DVD, you must read and decode this information and “translate” it, interpret it into a space-time universe. For the DVD, it’s simple, you have a “DVD player,” with its laser beam, and that’s it. But for the block universe, who reads the matrix?

The only way to find out, to know who reads the space-time block universe, so that it is actualized in a spatial universe that lasts, the only way: it is phenomenological analysis.

Said like that, it seems abstruse, but you’ll see it’s simple, but difficult, too, at the same time. Simple: you stop fidgeting around physically and mentally and you examine, observe, what is...

Not at the moment, because the observation is also difficult, because you are initially too disturbed and in the

---

<sup>60</sup> *The Bridges of Madison County*, Clint Eastwood, 1995.

<sup>61</sup> This being a metaphor, we will not take into account the time cuts over four days, which correspond to the scenario.

fog. But, in the long run, what you will discover is that what “reads” the block universe is consciousness.

The consciousness, usually, concentrated in a point which one calls the ego, is only a foam on the surface of the spatio-temporal infinite ocean. And even! A foam that makes the surface of a fingernail. Virtually nothing. But a nothing bloated with sufficiency and bombast and which invents a God to better have the impression of being able to apprehend everything.

Except that everything, well, it doesn’t give a damn about you and your infinitesimal consciousness. Everything could very well unfold without you, without your ego consciousness. And that is what is happening. You are reading these lines and in a while you will go here or there and maybe you will slip and break your leg or you will meet the love of your life, like Robert and Francesca, but all that is already in the block universe. You are just making it actual as your consciousness unfolds. You are the DVD player!

Yes, but then you will try to argue: what about my freedom and my free will? Yes, and so? Ask Robert and Francesca if they did not feel free to overturn social conventions to live their great love, *this unique love, which few people will know and some will never know* <sup>62</sup>.

And yet, isn’t everything already engraved on the DVD, including freedom and the feeling of freedom? Your feeling of choice, of free will, is only a feeling, attached to the characteristics of your ego consciousness, but modern science amply demonstrates to us that all this is only an illusion and that we do not in fact choose anything, everything is determined in advance. The feeling of freedom is only an indexing. Information about the universe-information.

---

<sup>62</sup> Scarlet Lama paraphrases here, with mischief, some of the cult lines of this magnificent drama.

From there, armed with this vision of the block universe, which contains the whole program of your life, as well as this illusion of “freedom,” it is possible that you move on to something else. Return to the “classic” vision, the cliché that “all this is only metaphysical speculation.” You will even forget that the GPS of your smartphone works thanks to the taking into account of the universe-block. Or... You will set off on an exciting discovery of this way of life and approach to ultimate reality which really takes into account the block universe. But that’s a whole other story...

## GLOSSARY OF SANSKRIT TERMS

**Alayavijñāna:** the “fundamental consciousness,” a concept taught by the *Cittamātra school*, but considered as vacuity by the *Mādhyamika* (middle way) school.

**Asura Loka:** the World of the Jealous Gods, one of the six worlds of the wheel of life, the cycles of the functioning of the Ego. It is the world of envy and jealousy in a competition between Egos.

**Avidyā:** one of the eight *Skandhas* which structure the Ego. It is the first form-ignorance, closing of the mind beyond *Vidyā*, the fundamental opening of the mind. It sees the emergence of the first phenomenal information, as a first universe-me duality, with the creation of space.

**Deva Loka:** the Divine World, one of the six worlds of the wheel of life, the cycles of the functioning of the Ego. It is the world of achievement and of arrogance and pride, of happiness and self-fulfillment, in pleasures and especially the pleasures of the mind.

**Duḥkha:** is fundamental and absolute suffering. Relative and conditioned suffering (justified by causes that precede it) is only one component of *Duḥkha*. This goes beyond, by also including the forms of disappointment, dissatisfaction, addiction, which reside even at the heart of pleasures and happiness and because of their impermanence.

**Kāma:** is desire associated with pleasure, in the fight against *Duḥkha*.

**Karma:** is the chain of cause and effect related to acts performed by an Ego. Karma is *therefore* a determinism which, from previous actions, influences present and future actions and their consequences.

**Mādhyamaka:** or “Middle Way,” is one of the two main specific schools of *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, alongside the *Cittamātra school*.

**Manovijñāna:** one of the eight *Skandhas* which structure the Ego. It is the final layer of the Ego, a reflective projection, from all of the sub-structures of the Ego, which becomes a reflective awareness of one’s own mind, a strong attachment to the outcome of one’s own thoughts.

**Manusya Loka:** the Human World, one of the six worlds of the wheel of life, the cycles of the functioning of the Ego. It is the world of ordinary life in pursuit of minimizing suffering and maximizing pleasure. Between hopes and fears. A world of intellectual discrimination.

**Māyā:** means the world of illusions that the Ego creates for itself by structuring itself. A world of dualities and artificial discriminations. The six worlds of the wheel of life, cycles of the functioning of the Ego are part of *Māyā*.

**Nāmarūpa:** is globally the illusion of existing as an individual, Ego. *Nāmarūpa* brings together all the *Skandhas* that make up the structure of the Ego.

**Naraka Loka:** the Infernal World, one of the six worlds of the wheel of life, the cycles of the functioning of the Ego. It is a world that can appear in two versions: 1) the “hot” version, made up of anger, hatred, violence and aggression, in great suffering; 2) the “cold” version, made up of paralysis, depression, slow self-destruction, in desolation and deadly addictions.

**Nirvāṇa:** is the extinction of the Ego, the deconstruction of its structures and the exit from its cycles of functioning and

reproduction. It is the end of ignorance and the return to *Vidyā*, the primordial opening. The Ego has its own materialistic conception of *Nirvāṇa*, which makes it deludedly imagine a kind of “paradise,” whereas *Nirvāṇa* is vacuity.

***Prajñā***: is the intuitive understanding of vacuity, especially tetralemmas.

***Prajñāpāramitā***: a collection of texts from *Mahāyāna Buddhism* concerning transcendental wisdom and vacuity.

***Preta Loka***: the World of Hungry Ghosts, one of the six worlds of the wheel of life, the cycles of the functioning of the Ego. It is the world of greedy and painful wandering, marked by intense frustrations, insatiable hungers, where the question of lack tends to block everything: access to current pleasure and future prospects for enjoyment.

***Rūpa***: one of the eight *Skandhas* which structure the Ego. It is the bodily form, in the discrimination between what is Ego and what is not Ego. It is an elementary reflexive projection, from the frameworks of space and time, in order to reify the Ego and distinguish it from the rest of the universe and in particular from the other Egos.

***Samadhi***: is the state of perfect condensation of the mind in a state of meditation. It is the result of letting go and non-effort in meditative exercise. It is therefore not a “concentration.” It is quite the opposite.

***Samjñā***: one of the eight *Skandhas* which structure the Ego. It is the structure of perceptions, qualities and tendencies, which are presented according to three fundamental categories: attraction, repulsion and indifference, intended to structure the forms-sensations.

***Samsāra***: is the round of endless desires on the wheel of the six worlds of *Māyā*, of illusions, which condition the dynamic functioning of the Ego.

***Samskāra***: one of the eight *Skandhas* which structure the Ego. It is the mind in its form of impulses and automatic

reactions which unfold from perceptions, qualities and tendencies, and which espouse these perceptions according to three reaction modalities: love-take-consume; hate-repel-aggress; and indifference-inhibition-ignorance.

**Śāśvatanāma:** one of the eight *Skandhas* which structure the Ego. It is the second form-ignorance, closing of the mind beyond *Vidyā*, the fundamental opening of the mind. At this level the Ego is structured in the form of an existence inscribed in a duration, a temporality. Typically, at this point, the Ego begins to believe itself to be eternal.

**Skandha:** also called “aggregate,” these are the various structures that make up the Ego. Traditionally five *Skandhas* (body form, sensations, perceptions, mind and consciousness) are described. But it is possible to further decompose these structures into eight *Skandhas* : *Avidyā*, *Śāśvatanāma*, *Rūpa*, *Vedanā*, *Samjñā*, *Samskāra*, *Vijñāna* and *Manovijñāna*.

**Śūnyatā:** means in Buddhism the vacuity of all things, of the phenomenal universe.

**Śūnyatīśūnya:** means the vacuity of vacuity (emptiness of emptiness, nothing of nothing), once one has understood the vacuity of phenomena and the self (consciousness).

**Tathatā:** this term which can be translated variously by thusness (or suchness, whatness, quiddity...) is an equivalent of vacuity (*Śūnyatā*), the conditioned co-production of phenomena, the absence of being-in-itself, of substantiality of phenomena. *Tathatā* is the mental attitude that arises from the understanding of *Śūnyatā*.

**Tiryagyoni Loka:** the Animal World, one of the six worlds of the wheel of life, the cycles of the functioning of the Ego. It is the world of slumber, the hibernation of intelligence and the extinction of creativity. It is marked with simplistic and extreme designs.

**Vedanā:** one of the eight *Skandhas* which structure the Ego. It is the structure of forms-qualities linked to sensations,



in a universe of sensory discriminations (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory and proprioceptive sensations).

**Vidyā:** is the open mind in the absence of Ego, before the structures of the Ego, which start with *Avidyā*, the first closure. However, it is possible to consider *Vidyā* as the minimal structure of the Ego, so minimal that one can say that there is no Ego yet (or no longer). Yet Ego is indeed in germ in *Vidyā*. True openness has no name, it is unspeakable, because it is inconceivable, it refers to the concept of vacuity.

**Vijñāna:** one of the eight *Skandhas* which structure the Ego. It is the transformation of underlying sensory and reactional structures into idea-forms, concepts and theories. The Ego structures itself here and feeds itself in the form of intellectualizations, of ideal discriminations, of categorizations, of sticking labels, of visions of the world, following interpretative logics.



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Writer, screenwriter, translator and independent publisher, formerly a clinical psychologist, Éric Loonis have published a few books on psychology, philosophy and textbooks. He has translated some of these works into English and into French Ernst Mach and H. G. Wells. He has also written fiction, with a first novel “L’enfant de la déesse” (scripted under the title: “Devadasi Child”) and a collection of short stories “Frida,” as well as spirituality-fiction with “Universe Leap.”

If you’re enjoying this book and would like a printed copy for your library, head over to Amazon!

**<https://www.amazon.fr/dp/2493956087>**

## **Free Buddhist thoughts on meditation, religion, science, and the universe.**

As a child, the one who would become the “Scarlet Lama” spilled a substance into a dyer’s vat containing two hundred sheets for the local monastery. The substance’s exact nature is unknown, but it had the effect of permanently changing the color of the dye to a deep, vibrant, almost luminous shade of red. The punishment for the novice was that he would be the sole owner of the two hundred scarlet sheets, to be worn for the rest of his life as a colored sign of his transgression. He came to be called “Scarlet Lama,” and his true name was eventually forgotten.

**“The dead religion is that which is fixed in its certainties forever. Living religion is that which perpetuates and nourishes the questioning of the human soul.”**

Later, Scarlet Lama was forced to emigrate to the United States to escape the Chinese invasion and its atrocities. There, he made use of the aid given by the great Western country and pursued advanced studies in theoretical physics and psychology. He gained advanced knowledge in philosophy, comparative religion, and many other fields of Western knowledge. This work of spiritual fiction was created from the compilation of talks and Q&A sessions with Scarlet Lama Rinpoche. Through his illuminating and prophetic words and responses (first part), Scarlet Lama invites us to understand the true “structure” of the Ego and the foundations of the diversion of the purity of the religious spirit to serve the endless desires of this Ego, what could be called a “religious materialism.” In the second part, Scarlet Lama answers by email to his correspondents who question him about meditation, the practice of Buddhism, religion, and science. Scarlet Lama’s answers are always original, somewhat iconoclastic, and come from an original Buddhism marked by his particular personality.

ISBN 978-2493956088



9 782493 956088